

# Teaching Stanislavski

An investigation into how Stanislavski is taught to students in the UK

A research project initiated by SCUDD (the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments) in conjunction with PALATINE (the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Dance, Drama and Music) and funded by a PALATINE Development Award.

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## An Introduction

This, I believe, is the first funded research report on the teaching of Stanislavski's ideas in the UK school and HE curriculum. As such it offers a glimpse of what we understand and teach about the art of acting, its development and particularly about the influence and practice of one Russian director who tried to develop a systematic approach to the art of acting a century ago.

The research employs qualitative methodology. It involves six case studies – three with 16+ students and teachers in schools and a Further Education College and three with teachers and students in Higher Education Institutions. Each case study has been undertaken and reported on by a different member of the research team. It includes interviews undertaken by members of the team with ten teachers from a wide variety of university and conservatoire departments offering degrees in Drama, Performance or Acting. Interviews and observations from teachers and directors working in Russia and the Czech Republic help to put the UK practice in context and offer comparative approaches. As the study not only considers the teaching of Stanislavski, but also the transition between the approaches of levels 3 and 4 in the UK academic infrastructure, an overview of the A-level and BTEC syllabi involving the study of Stanislavski is given.

Edited reports on different aspects of the research are presented in ten separate sections below and actual student work and excerpts from two interviews are shown on an accompanying DVD.<sup>1</sup> The full data and DVD recordings of interviews and practical work are stored at the Stanislavski Centre, Rose Bruford College. The nine-strong research team includes teachers from the UK School, FE and HE sectors. A further twenty-two teachers and theatre practitioners have been involved in the case studies, interviews and practical workshops.

In a discipline that is notorious for shrouding rehearsal room practice in secrecy, this research has encountered a positive and refreshing willingness to share examples of practice. More, in fact, than I think I have encountered in over thirty years of teaching in universities and conservatoires. It is difficult to find sound evidence of the curricula of training in theatre over the past fifty years but these case studies will at least offer scholars details of how the ideas of Stanislavski were being applied in school, college, university and conservatoire classrooms in 2008. The research offers detailed examples of how the mastery of practice based upon Stanislavski's ideas is delivered in the classroom.

Based on their observations, the team propose a number of recommendations which will enhance the teaching of Stanislavski at 16+ and beyond. We feel however that this work looks beyond the transition between levels of study and is significant in beginning to clarify the thoughts, practices and preconceptions which surround the study of

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<sup>1</sup> The research has abided by the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Guidelines for Educational Research* (2004). Informed consent has been obtained from the research participants, and student anonymity has been preserved at all times. Data from the research will be secured securely in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Stanislavski in the UK. It is, we hope, a small step towards a fuller documentation of Stanislavski-based performance pedagogy over the past fifty years.

The study does pose questions for us as practitioners and educators. It is surprising that for teachers of acting and for those who teach the history of theatre in the UK Stanislavski still remains at the forefront of important practitioners and has held the curriculum of so many acting schools in his thrall for such a time. As Sergei Tcherkasski from the St Petersburg Academy of Theatre Arts says in his interview, we would not expect a contemporary physicist to be following the precepts of Isaac Newton.

Yet it would seem that Stanislavski still matters to contemporary students of theatre because, according to one of our foremost directors, Declan Donnellan:

It is not just because he founded the Moscow Art Theatre and commissioned a short story writer, Anton Chekhov, to write the greatest plays since Shakespeare. He matters because he saw that there is something living at the heart of acting. He saw that there is a difference between acting and pretending. He saw that although this difference may be hard to express in words, it is nonetheless crucial. And he devoted his life to exploring these fine differences in quality.<sup>2</sup>

Stanislavski's understanding of theatre owed much to the problems posed by the new theatre writing of Chekhov and his ideas were a response to the new social realism of Chekhov's characters. The innovation of the playwright forced his director to examine how an actor – and indeed the whole Moscow Art Theatre company – might approach roles that could not be copied from 'master actors', that were not recognisable stereotypes and that depended upon ensemble playing. These ideas were developed by Stanislavski in the four studios for actors that he founded between 1912 and 1921 and in the opera studio for singers in 1924. Changing and developing his modes of rehearsal, devising exercises to develop and drive the artistic creativity of the actor, Stanislavski was to create the 'system' of training that we are considering in this research report.<sup>3</sup>

In Russia and Soviet countries these ideas were subsequently disseminated by his students as they went on to teach the next generation of student actors. Knebbel, Efros, Dodin, Galendeev, Efreimov and Vasiliev are a few examples of such actor teachers. The interviews with Sergei Tcherkasski and Katie Mitchell's account of her experience – all a part of Section Ten of this report – support this notion. Stanislavski's own practice in Russia has become embodied in successive generations of teacher practitioners in each academy and there the work has been passed down in practice. In the Czech Republic, Alexander Komlosi describes a similar 'atelier' system of training which involves Stanislavski practice being taught by a master-teacher, but he also mentions the use of a textbook or manual of acting by Yaroslav Vostri which describes the work.

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<sup>2</sup> Declan Donnellan, "Why Does Stanislavski Matter?" *Stanislavski on Stage*, eds. Kathy Dacre & Paul Fryer (Stanislavski Centre. Rose Bruford College. 2008) .63.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Benedetti notes that Stanislavski increasingly put the word in quotes, or referred to "my so called System" to avoid the notion that it was fixed or rigid. This report follows his convention of quotes. Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*. (London: Methuen, 2008). p1.

Our research, however, points to the very different journey that brought Stanislavski's ideas of practice to the UK and to the reasons why a theatrical and educational landscape absorbed them so readily.

Stanislavski's *My Life in Art* was published in English in 1924 and immediately had an impact on the theatrical world of New York and London. But its publication, as Laurence Senelick points out, was part of a publicity campaign accompanying the visit by the Moscow Art Theatre to the USA in 1923.<sup>4</sup> The Russian-born impresario Morris Gest "created an aura of aesthetic sanctity around the players even as he noisily promoted them." Stanislavski, keen to encourage this and also to acquire foreign currency while abroad, approached the Boston publisher Little, Brown with a proposal for a book about his 'philosophy of creative performance', but with the atmosphere of celebrity surrounding the tour, he was persuaded to write a 'colourful biography full of anecdotes and profiles' that was called *My Life in Art* and published in 1924. Senelick describes the chaotic writing process which created the book but it did, despite Stanislavski's misgivings, help to bolster the 'aura of sanctity' that Gest had devised. On his return to Moscow Stanislavski began work on a Russian version which he was much happier with and which became the basis for all subsequent non-English translations, but it was the English version which began to affect theatre practice in New York and London.

Peggy Ashcroft, at the time, a student at Central School of Speech and Drama and John Gielgud, a student at RADA, would later recall the excitement it caused.<sup>5</sup> The influence of the book later combined with the directorial work of Theodore Komisarjevsky to bring Stanislavski's ideas to the London stage. Komisarjevsky, the director of the Bolshoi Theatre, had left Russia after the revolution in 1919. His father had been Stanislavski's teacher and his half sister Vera had played Nina in the first production of *The Seagull*, going on to become one of Russia's finest actresses and founding her own theatre in St Petersburg. Komisarjevsky had succeeded Meyerhold there as artistic director. He, like Stanislavski, encouraged actors to find the inner reality of their role and his London direction of *Three Sisters* in 1926 began a series of highly praised Chekhov productions which demonstrated the strength of this new approach. His productions of *Macbeth* (1933) and *King Lear* (1936) were the remarkable apex of his UK career but he also found time to teach at RADA. Komisarjevsky had in fact in 1919 published a book on *The Creative Actor and the Stanislavski Theory*. A book which Stanislavski criticised but which nevertheless showed the extent to which Komisarjevsky was influenced by him. His work as a director in London and then in Stratford before going to New York in 1939 ensured that a new generation of actors knew about Stanislavski's ideas.

Another Russian exile, Mikhail Chekhov, also left England in 1939 for the USA. He too had brought Stanislavski's influence to the training of actors in the UK but in a more direct sense. In 1936 he had established a theatre school at Dartington Hall in Devon. Mikhail Chekhov, the nephew of Anton Chekhov, had been a pupil of Stanislavski's First Studio and led a company from the Second Studio but he had broken with Stanislavski and developed his own ideas on actor training from those early foundations, basing himself in Germany in the 1920s and then in the UK from 1936. His influence is

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<sup>4</sup> Laurence Senelick, "Stanislavsky's Double Life in Art" Intro. to Konstantin Stanislavski *My Life in Art* trans. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Croall, *Geilgud. A Theatrical Life*. (London: Methuen, 2001) pp70-74.

Michael Billington, *Peggy Ashcroft* (London: John Murray, 1988) pp20-21.

mentioned by two practitioners involved in this research – Julian Jones in Section Six and Colin Ellwood in Section Nine – as an influence on the student work and this influence is more likely to be a result of his book, work in the USA, and subsequent programmes by the Michael Chekhov Centre UK than the curriculum he created at Dartington, which had little time to make an impact.<sup>6</sup>

It is significant, however, that the impact that Stanislavski had on the theatre in the UK in the first half of the twentieth century is not mentioned at all by those involved in this research and further research in this area would be interesting. Certainly work at the Old Vic Theatre Schools in London and Bristol, under Hugh Hunt and Michel Saint Denis, encompassed the ideas of Stanislavski, and later teachers there, such as Duncan Ross and Rudi Shelley, were fully aware of Stanislavski's ideas and practice. When Rose Bruford created her theatre training programme at her college in Sidcup in the 1950s, Monday afternoon acting classes were based on Stanislavski<sup>7</sup>. Yet this early exploration of Stanislavski's ideas in UK theatre training goes largely undocumented and is – according to this research – not a primary influence on teachers practicing today.

Ironically, it is not those who experimented with Stanislavski's ideas in the UK, but those who expounded his ideas in the USA who feature as the conduit of influence on contemporary UK practice. Practitioners involved in the research at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), Rose Bruford College and Mountview Academy all confirmed that their practice of Stanislavski's ideas has been passed down to them through the influence of theatre teachers involved with the Group Theatre in America.

One unintended consequence of Gest's publicity campaign surrounding the 1923 Moscow Art season in New York was that two former members of Stanislavski's company, Richard Boleslavski and Maria Ouspenskaya decided, according to Richard Hornby, to 'cash in' on Stanislavski's success, and established the American Laboratory Theatre (ALT) in New York.<sup>8</sup> They hoped that this would, like the Russian company, present a mixture of new plays and classics and also offer classes to actors in the Stanislavski 'system'. The ALT in fact became a theatre school rather than a producing company and in his book *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, published in 1933, Boleslavski demonstrates the strength of Stanislavski's influence on his work – without attributing the ideas to him. In 1930 three of his students, Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman and Cheryl Crawford, formed the Group Theatre in New York which lasted until 1941. The company, which included Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner, introduced "an intensely emotional realistic acting style that electrified audiences wherever they played."<sup>9</sup> This style was developed in workshops taught by Strasberg, who would later join The Actors Studio, a successor organisation founded in 1947 by members of the Group, and become its Artistic Director from 1951 until his death in 1982. There he developed "the method," stressing far more than Stanislavski the role of personal experience in acting. He developed what Hornby calls "an approach to acting appropriate for a highly individualist, capitalist culture".<sup>10</sup>

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6 Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: on the technique of acting*, (London: Routledge, 2002)

7 Interview with Jean Benedetti. June 2009 & 1950 Timetable Rose Bruford College.

8 Richard Hornby, "Stanislavski in America" in *Stanislavski on Stage*, eds. Kathy Dacre & Paul Fryer. (Stanislavski Centre, Rose Bruford College, 2008)

9 Ibid. p58

10 Ibid. p59

So here we have working in a New York of the thirties, forties and fifties, three of the teachers who are cited in the research as influences on UK practice today. Adler and Meisner are cited by teachers working in higher education while the teachers working in schools on an A-level syllabus cite Strasberg as an influence on the student work. Strasberg is also included for study in the BTEC syllabus.

If tracing this “embodied knowledge”<sup>11</sup> pathway of Stanislavski’s influence through generations of students and teachers throws up anomalies and questions, then even more are thrown up by a consideration of the publication background of the Stanislavski texts which have, until the recent publication of new translations by Jean Benedetti, provided the nomenclature used in the classroom.<sup>12</sup>

If teachers of Stanislavski in New York were training actors for a capitalist culture then Stanislavski back in Russia was writing texts for a Stalinist Soviet. His Russian version of *My Life in Art* changes in order to conform to Soviet Communist ideology and his subsequent writings develop what Anatoly Smeliansky calls “the limiting framework of life-like theatre that was imposed on him by the Soviet understanding of theatre.”<sup>13</sup> It is worth remembering that Stanislavski was, with Gorky, among Stalin’s favourite artists and, although Stalin’s worst purges of intellectuals and artists took place after their deaths, state control was absolute in the early thirties when Stanislavski was writing. By 1934 all writing had to pass three levels of censorship.<sup>14</sup>

Are practitioners today aware of the problems inherent in the censorship that affected Stanislavski’s work? Julian Jones in Section Six admits:

The danger has been that the ideas of Stanislavski and those that followed in his wake have been hardened into ‘laws’ or ‘rules’, and their appropriation by various factions as a means of legitimisation has been decidedly counterproductive. This was in part a consequence of the ‘historic moment’ in which he wrote; late nineteenth/early twentieth-century thinking was wedded to the notion of a scientific positivism, where the development of ‘laws’ of acting did not seem out of place, and in Russia the growing demands of Socialist Realism colluded in the formulation of such ‘laws’.

It is however strange, and certainly a subject worthy of further study, that UK institutions have in many cases adopted a curriculum of actor training based on an approved Soviet idea of what theatre should be – essentially a tool of propaganda – and have then rigidly adopted ‘laws’, ignoring the maxim that great art is produced when laws are broken.

Jean Benedetti explains clearly how the American Hapgood translations of *An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character* and the later compilation, *Creating a Role* came about and how a copyright agreement with Elizabeth and Norman Hapgood controlled all English translations and all Western European translations from these versions until 1992. Further research on this agreement and on why Stanislavski was allowed to publish

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<sup>11</sup> When the knowledge is passed down from teacher to student in person.

<sup>12</sup> K. Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*. trans Jean Benedetti. (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Section Ten p 81.

<sup>14</sup> Isiah Berlin “The Arts in Russia Under Stalin” in *New York Review of Books*. Vol.47 No16, 19 October 2000.

abroad also warrants further study but meanwhile Benedetti shows that aspects of the UK curriculum are founded upon a narrow and often inaccurate translation of Stanislavski's words.<sup>15</sup> That students in UK classrooms refer to the rather formal "units" rather than the more accurate translation of "bits" is one simple example of how a curriculum can unwittingly be created from jargon. The focus upon the word "truth," for instance, by teachers and students is understandable in the early twentieth century, influenced in the USA by contemporary psychologists such as William James, whom Dee Cannon cites in Section Eight, but not in the light of later developments in psychology and the explorations and understanding of post modern performance practice.

If UK curriculum content focusing upon the ideas and practice of Stanislavski has its roots to some extent in accidents of theatre publicity and publication, then it also has roots in an accident of time. In 1960 many programmes of teacher training in the UK moved from a two-year to a three-year length. Acting diploma courses, which were later to become degrees, soon followed suit. The two-year courses had followed a curriculum which focused upon vocal and physical skill classes and scene rehearsal work in Year One and then either further scene work or a full production in Year Two. Suddenly there was space to fill. Stanislavski's systematic approach to working on a role and the analysis of text for rehearsal provided, as Rose Bruford found, a readymade curriculum for a first-year student of acting. Similarly the rise in the number of University Drama Departments influenced the school curriculum and by the 1970s, examination syllabi were available in Drama for the 16+ age group. These, in many cases, reflected what were seen to be the dominant influences on UK theatre – as taught by the Universities and the then Drama Schools. Only comparatively recently have practitioners begun to reflect critically upon their curriculum.

This reflection immediately highlights a pedagogical style encouraged by a practitioner who was working over eighty years ago and who chose to structure his writing as a fictional description of classroom practice. Perhaps encouraged by these descriptions, and perhaps because the style has proved itself to be efficacious, the teaching of Stanislavski's ideas in conservatoire institutions seems often to have remained the same for many years. As in the 'atelier'-based classes at DAMU, or St Petersburg Academy, students often have the one acting teacher for the whole year, if not for the whole course, and this builds up a master-pupil relationship by which the 'embodied knowledge' is passed on. In RADA, Jane Boston confirms there is a strong tradition of master-teachers from whom strict working parameters are delineated and with whom the acting process is experienced. They provide "a security from which the student can step into the exposure of the stage" and "a powerful discriminating mirror against which students learn about aspects of themselves in the acting moment".

There is certainly a fine line to be drawn between the development of reflective practitioners and the development of disciples, which becomes even more essential in degree based programmes.

An "anxiety of influence" can accompany actor training whereby the need to acknowledge a conscious debt to any predecessor can be seen to interfere with the engagement with the student. So the students in our school case study were far more aware than those at RADA that they were working with practice passed down from

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<sup>15</sup> Jean Benedetti. Translators foreword to K. Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* (London: Routledge, 2008) pp xviii-xix.



Stanislavski, whilst the students at Rose Bruford were aware that some of their work was based on Meisner but not that he had been taught by a pupil of Stanislavski and that Meisner had developed Stanislavski's work. The students in Section Nine were fully aware that they were comparing methodologies of developing performance but not the history of each approach.

An absence of clear reference to the expert systems<sup>16</sup> to which students are being introduced seems to fly in the face of all our attempts in Higher Education to ensure that students do not copy without attribution. It also blocks a student's capacity to become a truly reflective practitioner. The pedagogic style associated with Stanislavski encourages in-depth reflection upon the work – as Katie Mitchell's experience demonstrates in Section Ten – but it is an interrogation of the work produced, not the process by which it is produced. An investigation of the process of teaching instigated by Stanislavski's ideas takes us back to the very question he was trying to answer: what is the art of acting and how can one best nurture it? Research into the pedagogic styles used in performance training across Europe would be highly relevant initial research for our subject area.

I hope that this introduction gives something of a context for the research data which follows. The research has fore-grounded a number of key issues and has highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of Stanislavski in the UK. The field research is now presented in ten sections which cover the areas listed above. The report concludes with recommendations from the research team on ways to create greater alignment between research on and teaching about Stanislavski, together with recommendations on curriculum content and delivery.

**Professor Kathy Dacre  
Rose Bruford College  
September 2009**

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<sup>16</sup> "systems of expert knowledge, of any type, depending on rules of procedure transferable from individual to individual." A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: self and society in the late modern age* (Oxford: Polity press, 1991) p. 243.

## Section One: Stanislavski and the A-level and AS-level Examination Syllabi in the UK

*This section documents when and how Stanislavski is studied within the A-level and AS-level examination syllabi. Five examination Boards: Edexcel, AQA, SQA, WJEC and OCR syllabi are considered. Direct references and references to work that could include Stanislavski are noted. Quotations from the actual syllabi are in italics. Appendix 1 gives further details of each Board.*

### AQA

General Certificate of Education Drama and Theatre Studies 2009

#### Aims

They should recognise the importance of both discipline and cooperation within practical drama and theatre projects and acquire practical theatre skills such as design skills and/or performance skills in ensemble work, mime/movement, physical theatre, voice, improvisation/role play, acting techniques and characterisation, as appropriate to their own dramatic intentions.

#### Subject Content

##### AS Module 3 Theatre in Practice – Written

Section A requires candidates to *“form judgements about live theatre observed, communicating their understanding of style, directorial interpretation, theatrical concepts and dramatic forms”*. In Section B candidates are required to *“demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the work and significance of one of the prescribed theatre practitioners.”*

Section B of this module is based on the study of the theories and practice of one of three theatre practitioners prescribed for the AS:

1. Stanislavski
2. Craig
3. Artaud

*In their study of individual theatrical practitioners, candidates are expected to explore both the theories and the practice of their chosen practitioner and to communicate their understanding of the practitioner’s aims and intentions, his working methods and achievements and his significance for contemporary theatre practice.*

*In the examination, candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the selected practitioner’s contribution to the theatre, including such aspects as:*

*The practitioner’s:*

1. *theatrical context*
2. *developing theatrical purpose*
3. *ideas and theories about how to achieve this*
4. *working methods*
5. *attitudes towards the role of the director*
6. *methods of rehearsal*
7. *ideas about the actor’s role*

8. *ideas about actor training*
9. *ideas about the actor/audience relationship*
10. *collaboration with others*
11. *ideas about theatre form/stage setting*
12. *political aims*
13. *productions/projects*

### **Centre-Assessed Components**

#### **Guidance on the Centre-Assessed Components (Practical) Unit 4 A Level (p38)**

*Candidates who nominate Acting as a skill should give details of their approach to performance skills, their experiment with technique and/or work undertaken to build a role or character, as appropriate to the needs of the piece.*

#### **Requirement for Specific Skills (p42)**

*The personal portfolio, which accounts for half of the marks awarded for preparation, development and analysis, should contain evidence of understanding of acting techniques appropriate to each role undertaken within the presentation and evidence of exploration and experiment, in terms of both vocal and physical elements, with regard to its effective execution.*

### **Edexcel**

#### **Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Drama and Theatre Studies (8DR01) Advanced GCE in Drama and Theatre Studies (9DR01)**

#### **Unit 1 Exploration of Drama & Theatre (pp15-16)**

*This unit introduces students to the content of plays written for the theatre. They will learn how to analyse plays in a variety of ways so that they become familiar with the way written plays can be interpreted for realisation in performance.*

*Explore at least one of the plays in terms of at least one recognised practitioner.*

*At least one of the plays must be studied in the light of a recognised influential practitioner. This might be an individual who has made a unique contribution to theatre practice, e.g. Artaud, Boal, Brecht, Craig, Grotowski, Stanislavsky, or a theatre company that has developed a specific style, e.g. Complicité, Knee High, DV8, Moscow Arts Theatre.*

#### **Unit 3 Exploration of Dramatic Performance (p46)**

*Students should develop their performance piece in the light of the style and ideas of a practitioner/s.*

#### **Appendix 6 – Further resources and support (p83)**

*Benedetti J — Stanislavski: An Introduction (Methuen)*

## OCR

### Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Performance Studies H148

### Advanced GCE in Performance Studies H548

No direct or even indirect references to Stanislavski or his legacy were made by this exam board. The focus of the curriculum is on the relationship between the three artistic disciplines of dance, drama and music. Where units call on the development of performance skills, no mention of Stanislavski's system of acting is made or reference to building a character in the Stanislavski manner.

In appendix B2.5: Practical - Performance skills in drama, dance and music (pp45) there is an item of assessment that requires the student to “*demonstrate breadth of technique*”. This is clarified further in Appendix B3.4: Student-Devised Performance – Performance Skills (pp52) and states the following:

*Award a mark for application of skills for the quality of the performance. Take account of the candidate's level and range of skills. These may include the following (and others, as appropriate):*

*Fluency; use of space; use of body: eye, voice, demeanour, posture and movement; intensity of the commitment/involvement, contrast, pacing; balance of skills across two or more art forms; interaction with the group and contribution to the group dynamics.*

None of these elements of technique refer to the Stanislavski system of acting. It is thus difficult to identify any consideration of the Stanislavski system of acting in the curriculum of this examination board.

## SQA

### National Qualifications Group Award - Drama: Theatre Performance (SCQF Level 6)

#### Drama: Acting Skills

*This Unit is designed to help candidates understand the overall acting process. [...] Candidates will then be required to develop a character from either text or observation, exploring in some detail the depth of this character.*

#### Drama: Theatre Skills in Performance

*Candidates will apply theatre skills to the rehearsal and performance of a role to an audience and will learn about the complementary roles of the Actor and Director.*

#### Theatre History: An Introduction to Theory and Practice

*The Unit is designed to be approached both theoretically and practically, enabling the candidates to explore Western theatre before the Twentieth Century and the resulting practical implications for the actor.*

#### Acting Styles and Practitioners

*This Unit is designed to be approached both theoretically and practically. The candidate will explore the theories of two acting practitioners and demonstrate the key components of one practitioner in practice. Candidates will have the opportunity to evaluate their experience within the rehearsal and performance process.*

## WJEC

### AS & A GCE in Drama and Theatre Studies Specification 2009-2010

#### Aims

##### Knowledge and Understanding (p8)

##### **AS candidates will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:**

*How style, form, dramatic structure and characterisation can be interpreted and realised in performance and how plays relate to their historical, social and cultural context*

*The work of two practitioners and their contribution to theatre practice.*

##### **A Level candidates will demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of:**

*The connections between theory and practice demonstrated through a range of forms, genres and performance styles.*

#### Specification Content (pp 10-14)

##### **AS**

*Candidates will choose two practitioners to study in their workshop. They will then apply that practitioner's ideas and theories to their text and devised pieces. One practitioner should be applied to the chosen text the other to the devised piece.*

*The practitioners are: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Craig, Artaud, Brook, Berkoff, and Boal.*

##### **A**

*Acting will involve developing and extending the skill developed for AS unit DA1. The acting group should be between 2 and 4 candidates. The total time for the two scenes should follow the formula of 10 minutes per candidate. Candidates should note that the examiner will base assessment on evidence of achievement within the allotted time and will disregard evidence that goes beyond this allowance.*

*Candidates will need to demonstrate the following performance skills:*

- Identification of character
- Voice, speech and sound
- Movement, gesture, use of body in space and physical relationships
- Listening and responding, interaction with others
- Power to engage an audience.

*Candidates should be encouraged to apply different performance styles to various texts so that they have the opportunity to explore different styles and techniques.*

#### **Textual Study**

*Candidates will choose two texts from the following list, one from each group.*

*Group A includes: Chekov: Uncle Vanya (Methuen (ISBN 0-413-77471-6))*

*Candidates will explore the following in each text:*

- theatrical context
- theatrical challenges of text in terms of acting
- theatrical challenges in terms of production skills
- personal reaction to the text

## Section Two: Teaching Stanislavski within an A-level and AS-level Curriculum (Case Studies)

*Bev Vincent, the writer of this section, is Head of a Performing Arts Faculty and has taught drama in schools for twenty years. She has an MA in Arts Education and is a mentor for student drama teachers training at Central School of Speech and Drama. She describes below the research she contributed to the project and examples of the work she refers to can be found on the Stanislavski Project DVD. References to any terms taken from Stanislavski's teaching are in italics. Appendix 2 gives further details of the curriculum.*

I have always found teaching Stanislavski extremely challenging, yet even though the teaching of Stanislavski has not been a compulsory element of the Edexcel A-level Drama and Theatre studies syllabus, I have always felt the need to teach his methods and techniques. I do not know any other teacher of drama in any other school who does not feel the same. Introducing students to the basics of Stanislavski's teachings immediately allows students starting an A-level course to understand that acting isn't just about having a natural talent to get up and act but that in order to become a really good actor and to produce a moving piece of theatre, there needs to be some preparation, whether using Stanislavski's methods or those of others. As they are introduced to the styles of a variety of theatre companies and directors throughout the course, the teachings of Stanislavski are a foundation from which they can compare and contrast.

In this research, I used my own school, Copthall School, and Mill Hill County High School as case studies. Both schools are situated in the borough of Barnet, London. Copthall School is a girls' Community Comprehensive School with students from a wide range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. About two thirds of students speak a home language other than English and the number of students eligible for free school meals is average (OFSTED 2008). Mill Hill County High School is a Foundation Comprehensive School with a lower than average proportion of students eligible for free school meals. One quarter of students speak a home language other than English.

At Copthall School, I interviewed Kate Jamie (Teacher A), who adapted and delivered the scheme of work for the new Edexcel Unit 1 AS Drama requirements. She had chosen to teach Stanislavski, relating his methods and techniques to Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The other practitioners chosen were the Shared Experience theatre company. Brecht and Artaud were briefly studied at the start of the course.

At Mill Hill County, I interviewed Angela Moore (Teacher B), the Head of Drama and Dance. At her school, they were teaching Stanislavski and relating it to *Oleanna* by David Mamet. They study Brecht as their second practitioner.

I interviewed students from a Year 12 class and video recorded their lesson. I observed two other Year 12 lessons where students were using Stanislavski's ideas and a Year 13 class in which a student director uses Stanislavski methods to help with characterisation. Each class varies in ability with predicted A-level grades ranging from A to D.

The first question I asked the teachers was whether they thought it was a good idea that Edexcel have now added the requirement to teach two drama practitioners as part of

the AS. Both teachers replied with a resounding 'yes' and both had taught Stanislavski to A-level Drama students even before it was a requirement:

Teacher A: "So much of his work is ingrained really in contemporary theatre, whether or not companies are moving away from it. The basics of the 'system'<sup>17</sup> ... is a really good starting point. ... It gives you a structure with which to be creative. If you look at theatre companies such as Shared Experience, they even take stuff from Stanislavski and they work with it, build on it. ... Stanislavski is always a reference point ... even if you go towards a more Artaudian or Brechtian approach."

Teacher B: "I think it is vital for students to understand where theatre comes from and its place in history ... Stanislavski changed how theatre developed and I think to miss out on his theories and practises out of an A-level course is almost saying to them acting is just about getting up there, spouting a few lines, doing a few actions and entertaining an audience. Actually, in order for them to take Drama as a serious subject on a UCAS application form, they need to go beyond, 'I get up and do a bit of acting'."

The A-level Drama and Theatre Studies syllabus is very full and applying Stanislavski to a text is only a section of Unit 1. Teacher A estimated spending about 8-9 hours of teaching time on Stanislavski and Teacher B couldn't specify but said that for a whole term, three hours a week, *Oleanna* was being taught 'with Stanislavski in mind' and some lessons were more specific during planning.

I asked what exactly was taught about Stanislavski in this Unit (the schemes of work can be found as appendices).

Teacher A: "There are no boundaries ...when I did A-level at school, it wasn't in enough detail and when I went to University I needed to go back and go into it in much more depth."

Both schools use the new Edexcel student text book but Stanislavski is shown in relation to specific plays so they may find it difficult to relate it to the play their school is studying. Both schools give recommended reading for students to study independently such as *An Actor Prepares* and Benedetti's *Stanislavski: An Introduction*. Only a small number of the students in both schools had actually read any of the recommended further reading. Both teachers, however, felt that most of their students did have a good basic knowledge of Stanislavski's theories and practices.

When interviewing the students, Year 12 came up with explanations of *Given Circumstances*, *Super Objectives/Objectives*, *Magic If*, *Units of Action*, *Emotion Memory*, *Audience as the Fourth Wall*, *Striving for Realism* and *Subtext*. They knew why looking at Stanislavski was important:

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<sup>17</sup> Jean Benedetti notes that Stanislavski increasingly put the word in quotes, or referred to "my so called system" to avoid the notion that it was fixed or rigid. This report follows his style. Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 2008)

Student C: "He had a system and there were loads of factors in that system and he wanted to show that all action that happens on stage has a purpose ... so you are not just saying the lines, you build up the knowledge of the character and that makes it believable."

They knew what these elements meant in rehearsal and explained them with good examples, saying why they were useful, although some of them couldn't always remember the correct terminology. The video extract gives an example of their learning and how they have applied it to the text. Their written work also reflects this (Appendix 2). Students interviewed thought that it was good to have been taught Stanislavski:

Student D: "I think it is ... Now if I'm acting in a play that is meant to be realistic I think of these things. If I am doing an action, I question myself now ... I think about acting with purpose. With '*Given Circumstances*', it creates understanding for the actors ... and that makes it clearer to the audience."

When asked if they think they will use any of his work in the future, they all seemed to agree that they would choose relevant parts of it.

Student C: "You will always be able to use some factors of Stanislavski; you would always be able to use "Units of Action", "Objectives" and "Super Objectives." I wouldn't use the entire System. You would always be able to use some factor ... It always like naturally comes up even if you are not specifically saying 'I am going to use Stanislavski techniques', like, say, for example, if you are going to do *Given Circumstances*, you might not always call it that but you need to know it if you are going to play that character well."

Both teachers agreed that because of time restrictions they don't go into as much depth as they would like. Lessons in a school tend to be only an hour long:

Teacher A: "One of the difficulties they (the students) had was: "Units of Action" and "Objectives." It would have taken several hours to break down a scene in the way Stanislavski suggested, but trying to do that in the time that we have was even more challenging."

Another difficulty cited by Teacher A was:

"Teaching it in a divided structure yet trying to get the students to look at it as a whole system, looking at it holistically."

Teacher B felt that her students sometimes got confused with:

"Stanislavski and what happened in New York with Lee Strasberg and the movement away to Method Acting. A lot of them watch film and they use film as their basis to understand Naturalism. They could probably talk to you about the Actors Studio at that time."

In my own lessons at Copthall School I have found that students tend to get very fixated with the concept of "emotion memory." They tend to find it fascinating and maybe because of their young age, they love digging into their emotional, "angst-ridden" past but sometimes are too immature to deal with it and can't really understand how to use it in their acting. In one of my Year 13 rehearsals this year, the student who was



directing the play “Noughts and Crosses” for Unit 5 (Text in Performance 11), was trying to get her actors to create a more believable “family in distress” scene and attempted to use “emotion memory” but it evidently didn’t work as she had clearly not understood the technique or realised the amount of time needed for it. At one point, the student director (Student D) asked one of her actors:

Student D: “Do you remember a time when you have been really let down by someone?”

Student E: “No, not really.”

Student D: “Well just remember a time when you were really upset instead. OK ... 3 2 1 Action!”

Student D clearly misunderstood the depth of exploration Stanislavski would have expected in this situation.

Afterwards, the student director said she really didn’t feel comfortable doing it. In fairness we had not taught it in any depth either as we did not want to put too much emphasis on it and felt it inappropriate anyway for students of this age. Even though it is explained to them that Stanislavski moved away from the importance of this over time, it is always something they like to use, often ineffectively, when rehearsing for performances. In Mill Hill County School they avoid any use of “emotion memory” and explore “emotional transference” as they “don’t feel ‘emotion memory’ is safe for 16/17 year olds.” However, they learn about it theoretically.

I have found that when I am teaching Stanislavski, students tend to focus on the “Internal Creative State.” They don’t seem to grasp the “External Creative State.” When I interviewed the students, there was no mention of “Physical Action” or “Physical Characterisation.” They didn’t mention importance of “Voice”, “Speech”, “Movement”, “Tempo” or “Rhythm,” although they were demonstrating it in their lessons. Perhaps this is because students of this age enjoy getting ‘in touch with their emotions’ and the “Internal Creative State” therefore is of more interest to them.

In the Year 13 rehearsal, the student had asked her cast to work out the “Super Objectives” and “Objectives” of their characters and this was more successful. It is clear, though, that the Year 12s have a more sound understanding of Stanislavski than the Year 13s despite being no more academic. This is likely to be because this year it is now a required element in Edexcel courses so we have taught it in a more focussed way and in more depth.

In the old syllabus, we taught an introductory course including the History of Theatre, Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud in the first three weeks of Year 12 and would refer to Stanislavski as and when the teacher felt it was relevant throughout the course. The teaching of Stanislavski in a couple of weeks gave the students a slightly crude view of his methods.

I think that students find it quite difficult to grasp that Stanislavski’s ideas developed and changed over the years – particularly ideas of the development from Naturalism to Realism. This was also felt to be the case in Mill Hill County High School. We all felt that there was not enough time to cover this in sufficient depth. Even so, Teacher A felt it was important to introduce how Stanislavski developed his ideas and theories.

Teacher A: "I think it's good to see it as a life's work, it was always changing, it was always evolving."

Students in both schools are encouraged to use the knowledge learnt about the practitioners in all of the work that follows. All teachers and students confirmed they used some of Stanislavski's techniques in the rehearsals for their examination performances.

Teacher A: "We still talk about objectives. In our rehearsal today with Year 12 (Unit 2 Theatre Text in Performance) we stopped the action by clapping at certain moments to decide what the objective was; links in with acting with purpose."

Both schools also now link the preparation for the new element of Unit 2, Section A, 'performing a monologue or duologue', with some of Stanislavski's practices. In Copthall we expect them to work out character profiles, "Given Circumstances", "Objectives", etc. for their characters. In Mill Hill County High School:

Teacher B: "Whilst the monologue itself may not be naturalistic, the characterisation that they have to perform is based very much on Stanislavski's techniques and we would have talked to them about writing the character profile, giving the character a history and putting it in context of the whole play."

In Year 13, even though both schools found that students don't tend to want to perform plays which are Naturalistic or Realistic in style, elements of Stanislavski are used in rehearsal. I expect that, with the change in the syllabus this year, future Year 13s will use Stanislavski in a more informed way.

This research clearly has its limitations in that I have only looked at two schools. The students in these two schools do have an understanding of Stanislavski's methods and techniques but only at a basic level. It is likely that degree level institutions will see an improvement in the knowledge and understanding of Stanislavski now that the teaching of theatre practitioners is a requirement of the Edexcel syllabus. The majority of teachers are likely to choose Stanislavski but time is still limited and as Stanislavski is still not specifically required to be taught on the Edexcel syllabus, there will be students who have virtually no knowledge of his ideas.

## Section Three: Stanislavski and the Business and Technology Education Council National Award, Certificate, and Diploma Syllabi in Performing Arts.<sup>18</sup>

*This section documents when and how Stanislavski is studied within the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) examination syllabi in Performing Arts. Four unit descriptions in particular refer to work that could include reference to Stanislavski and detailed descriptions of these four – 12, 19, 20, & 26 – are given below. Direct references and references to work that could include Stanislavski within the unit descriptions are highlighted in italics. Anthony Dalmás who writes Section Four describes other units where the ideas of Stanislavski can be applied.*

### **Unit 12: Classical Theatre Performance**

**NQF Level 3: BTEC National Guided learning hours: 60**

#### **Unit abstract**

Audiences and performers enjoy experiencing the ideas and performing styles of previous eras, not least for the light that they can throw on our current world. For many professional performers, presenting classical theatre represents one of the greatest challenges to their abilities and creativity. Performers must be flexible in their professional training so that they can meet this demand. In this unit, learners will explore the disciplines that this style of performance requires.

At first sight, changes in time and society may make a classical play seem distant from today's concerns. Modern actors need to explore the background of the classical play to understand its relevance to them. They need to be able to see what it is about, what drove the writer to create it in the way it appears and how best they should interpret it for a modern audience. They need to be able to 'unlock' the language in which the text is written so that they can feel and express it fully. Often actors are expected to carry out preparation alone, before rehearsals start, so that they can make maximum progress when they gather as part of a team to create the performance.

Once rehearsals begin, they need to be able to contribute fully and to meet their director's requirements. Their individual characterisation has to work with the rest of the interpretation. To achieve this, actors have to be able to bring a range of technical and imaginative skills to bear. When the day of the performance arrives, they must be physically and vocally expressive and fully committed to their performance, both emotionally and intellectually.

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<sup>18</sup> Edexcel Level 3 BTEC Nationals in Performing Arts – Issue 1 – January 2007  
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### **Learning outcomes**

On completion of this unit a learner should:

1. Understand the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles
2. Know how to explore a classical text's language and style
3. Be able to rehearse creatively and responsibly
4. Be able to perform classical texts.

Learners will be assessed in the performance of two classical texts. Where a performance is a solo speech it should last approximately two minutes. Performance of a scene or extract should last approximately five minutes.

### **Unit content**

#### **1 Understand the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles**

Social and historical: subject matter; political; social; cultural; economic; religious conditions

Cultural: treatment of themes and issues; the place and function of plays and playwrights; the use of props and costumes; the conventions of movement and expression, e.g. social mannerisms or formalities

#### **2 Know how to explore a classical text's language and style**

Research and analysis: language and imagery; psychology of the characters; coherent interpretation; identification and consideration of the author's intentions

Styles and approaches: form and structure; heightened language; registers; imagery; rhythm and metre; relationship between sound and meaning

#### **3 Be able to rehearse creatively and responsibly**

Listening and responding: taking direction; flexibility; rehearsal techniques and exercises; interacting as a member of a group

Growth and development: creatively experimenting; taking risks in roles; characterisation; physical and vocal elements; refining ideas; learning and memorising texts

Personal management: time management; physical and mental preparation; the working log; rehearsal props; costume and equipment; healthy and safe working practices; concentration and self-discipline; individual and group responsibilities

#### **4 Be able to perform classical texts**

Physical expression: posture; gesture; tempo-rhythm; dynamics; use of energy; stylistic features demanded by the text

Vocal expression: range and use of the voice in response to text, including tone, control, inflection, projection; register; diction; pace; pitch

Emotional investment: focus; interaction and response; emotional range; coherence and consistency; relationship with the audience

### **Essential guidance for tutors**

#### **Delivery**

Most learning should take place through practical workshop classes and rehearsals in which knowledge is gained through experience. The rehearsals will be mostly tutor-led and directed; learners should benefit from the group discussion that can be an integral part of a good rehearsal. Rehearsals will develop individual actor preparation work that the learner has undertaken beforehand, outside the rehearsal room.

*Such practical classes should be supported by learners' research into the background of classical texts. The contents of this research will vary, depending on the texts involved, but it should cover social, historical, cultural and artistic issues. Learners should interpret the information they have found and relate it in some depth to the text that is being studied, so that it illuminates their performances of roles. Where learners are working to create the same play in performance, they should be encouraged to share their research discoveries and ideas.*

Presentations of extracts or of whole plays to an audience should result from workshops and rehearsals. The audience could be limited in size, typically to the learner's fellow students, or it could be extended to a wider public. Both rehearsals and performances should be recorded so that learners can review, evaluate and develop their abilities.

Tutors should ensure that learners recognise that learning can take place without the learner necessarily playing the 'star' role in a play or an extract, but it is the tutor's duty to attempt to ensure that the learner plays a role that will provide sufficient opportunities to meet the grading criteria at an appropriate standard.

When learners undertake this work, they will be following good vocational practice in terms of individual preparation, group rehearsal and public performance.

### **Assessment**

Evidence to support assessment in this unit will be generated in appropriate research and analysis, in practical workshop classes and in rehearsed performance. Preparation and performance of two contrasting texts are necessary for assessment in this unit.

Evidence for research could be presented in an actor's log or another format that links both research and rehearsal. Its presentation could be written or in some other form, such as film or recording.

Learning in rehearsal could also be recorded in an actor's log, or it might be filmed or otherwise recorded, so that evidence can be provided and retained. A tutor statement might accompany such evidence.

Video/DVD record and a tutor's statement will provide evidence of the learner's presentation or performance of the text. Evaluative comment by the learner might be included in the final actor's log or in a recorded discussion.

### **Essential resources**

A practical studio space is required, a range of appropriate texts and supporting research material, sufficient and appropriate rehearsal props and costumes to give 'work in progress' presentations.

Observing other learners working in rehearsal can often be helpful. Sharing an ensemble creative process can stimulate the individual learner. Where possible, the opportunity should be created for the learner to see live professional performances. Often it will be enjoyable and beneficial for learners to take part in workshops that professional

companies offer to accompany their performances. Larger theatre companies sometimes publish books of productions, covering rehearsal methods and work that lies behind performances.

### **Indicative reading for learner**

The indicative reading suggested below refers to approaches to Shakespearean texts. *It is quite possible to study texts from other playwrights and other periods in this unit and consequently other indicative reading would then be appropriate.*

## **UNIT 19: PRINCIPLES OF ACTING**

**NQF Level 3: BTEC National Guided learning hours: 60**

### **Unit abstract**

Acting is a mixture of techniques and art. The actor needs to connect mastery of their technique with an imaginative and creative approach to their work. Understanding the essential principles of acting is the springboard from which successful performances are launched. Actors need time and space to study and explore the processes and skills required to develop their craft. This unit has the necessary practical focus that professional actors use and will provide many opportunities to consider a range of techniques that can help the actor to characterise a performance both physically and vocally. The learner will also discover how to interpret and realise text and how to communicate this text effectively to an audience.

In this unit the learner will study key principles of acting using a range of techniques. Learners will explore these principles both theoretically and practically and use the skills and techniques to develop characterisation and rehearse material for performance. The unit will also enable the learner to evaluate their rehearsal and performance processes and to consider the relative success of different acting styles in communicating with an audience.

Learners will apply exercises and techniques in a range of vocational contexts. The role of the actor is a broad one and requires the ability to interpret text and apply acting techniques in a focused and creative manner while developing work for performance. Learners will be encouraged to consider how these skills fit the purpose for which they are used and how actors employ different methods of characterisation — vocal and movement techniques for instance — whilst they are developing work and rehearsing.

### **Learning outcomes**

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the means and processes of characterisation
- 2 Know how to interpret and realise text
- 3 Be able to use acting and rehearsal techniques to develop a performance
- 4 Be able to perform as an actor.

Learners should take part in a series of practical workshops. They should rehearse and give at least two performances to last 20 to 30 minutes each. One of these may be based on improvisation but one must be text based.

## Unit content

### 1 Understand the means and processes of characterisation

*Preparation and improvisation: observation; background and research; imitation; exploration; identification; sensation; feeling; emotional truth; concentration; focus*

*Skills and techniques: movement; voice; gesture; emotional range and investment; interaction and responsiveness; use of space; use of time; use of weight; dynamics; inner and outer characteristics, physicalisation*

### 2 Know how to interpret and realise text

Research and analysis: social and historical background; psychological insight; interpretation; other, e.g. identification, uniting, comparison, editing

Styles and approaches: e.g. naturalism and realism, expressionism, epic, physical theatre, Greek, choral and ensemble, melodrama, grotesque, farce, acting in voice drama, theatre of cruelty, theatre of the absurd

### 3 Be able to use acting and rehearsal techniques to develop a performance

Influences and key practitioners: e.g. Stanislavski, Brecht, Berkoff, Artaud, Brook, Fo, Pinter, Grotowski, Craig

*Personal management: time management; physical preparation; mental preparation; use of actor's log; costume and props; healthy and safe working practices; concentration and discipline; trust and cooperation; responsibilities*

Listening and response: taking direction; creative flexibility and generosity; use of rehearsal exercises and technique; group interaction, responding positively to feedback

Growth and development: *experiment and risk; engagement with the role; character decisions; extension and refinement; memorising; sustained spontaneity*

### 4 Be able to perform as an actor

Vocal and physical expression: range and use of instrument; tone; pace; pitch; control; inflection; projection; register; idiosyncrasy; dialect and accent; posture; gesture; *tempo-rhythm*; energy

Emotional investment: commitment on stage; interaction and response; playing the moment; public solitude; appropriateness and use of emotional range; coherence and consistency of role; character journey

## Essential guidance for tutors

### Delivery

This unit should use practical workshop classes to develop learners' acting techniques. Learners should be introduced to the theories and techniques of at least two of the key practitioners in this area and be given the opportunity to explore these theories in a guided manner. Learners should be encouraged to develop their understanding of these

techniques through applying them, in both controlled and independent ways, to their rehearsal and creative processes.

The rehearsals will mostly be tutor-led and directed, although from the early stages learners should be made aware that there is a great deal of individual preparation work that an actor has to undertake outside the rehearsal room. Direction at this level, and for this unit's objectives, is largely about enabling learners to ask the right sort of questions of a text and a character, realising the decisions and the answers in practical ways. Skills in interpretation should also encompass the appropriateness of the performance style for different types of text. Learners should have time in class to work as individuals, but most of the work will be group based. It is often valuable for learners to observe others from the same group rehearsing scenes, thus sharing the ensemble creative process. Opportunities to watch professional performance should also be built into the delivery of this unit and learners should be encouraged to use analysis and discussion to inform their development as a performer.

The actor's log should be guided so that it becomes a useful working tool, not just a descriptive diary. In order to maximise the value of the creative log learners should be encouraged to develop their skills in recognising the strengths and weaknesses in their practical work and setting objectives for improvement of skills. Preparatory work, such as the results of off-text improvisations, selected findings from research and biographical sketches of character, should all appear in the log, together with a final reflective evaluation of the performance.

The performances should be to a live audience but not necessarily in a formal theatrical setting: other staff and learners who understand the workshop, or 'in progress', nature of this work may be a more appropriate audience than the general public.

### **Assessment**

Evidence for this unit will be generated in both practical workshop classes and rehearsed performance, underpinned by appropriate research and textual analysis. Evidence will be primarily through teacher statement supported by video/DVD recording. The research and rehearsal phases will be evidenced by an actor's log that will document the investigations, theoretical and experiential, carried out on character roles. The log should conclude with an evaluation of the assessed performance. Although this log will generally be written, learners should be encouraged to use a range of supporting material and to express their creative process in a personal manner. In order to support a range of learners' needs it may be appropriate to consider different methods of collating the evidence (video/DVD diary, viva voce, discussion groups). Further evidence of learners' working processes and creative contribution to the performance will be in the form of teacher statements, either contained in the feedback given to the learner, in an interim recorded feedback session, or through the use of an observation report of the learner's work. It may also be appropriate to consider the use of video/DVD recording to provide evidence at key stages during the rehearsal process.

*Learners will explore the principles and practices of different approaches to acting, considering the theories and techniques linked to at least two key theatre practitioners and experimenting with these techniques in workshop situations.* The unit requires the learners to prepare at least two roles for assessment. They are likely to use edited extracts from texts, as this



unit does not require learners to prepare and perform full-length plays. However, the extract(s) should allow for the exploration and realisation of character development and emotional range. The texts may be devised, but there should be a finished text from which to work in order to fulfil grading criteria. Text can be taken to mean any guiding framework from which an actor can work and is not limited to conventional script. If learners create and work from a devised text, the devising process itself should not form part of the assessed evidence for this unit.

### **Essential resources**

Learners are their own resource for this unit. They will require a practical studio space in which to work, and video/DVD equipment will be needed for evidence recording purposes. An appropriate range of texts and supporting research material is required, and the learner should also have access to the internet for research purposes. Learners should have access to the production means to perform work to an audience under 'work in progress' studio conditions, e.g. appropriate rehearsal props and costumes, although these are needed only insofar as they enable the actor to realise a role to its full potential. The opportunity to see live professional performances, in the style of the work(s) being prepared for performance, is another vital resource.

### **Indicative reading for learners**

Boal A — Games for Actors and Non Actors (Routledge, 2002)

Callow S — Being an Actor (Vintage, 2004)

Hodge A — Twentieth Century Actor Training (Routledge, 1999)

Nunn T — The Actor and the Text (Virgin, 2000)

Sher A — Year of the King (Nick Hern, 2004)

Stanislavski C — An Actor's Handbook (Routledge, 2004)

## **UNIT 20: APPLYING ACTING STYLES**

**NQF Level 3: BTEC National Guided learning hours: 60**

### **Unit abstract**

The development of the drama can be seen as a series in which style has evolved and altered. Each period throughout its history has produced a recognisable style of acting that is suited to the work of contemporary playwrights and, in turn, communicates meaning to an audience.

*Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century there has been a great deal of critical analysis and evaluation of the various acting styles that have emerged. Moreover, during the same period a number of important practitioners have produced myriad ideas, techniques and even philosophies of acting.*

This panoply of riches now forms the material from which the actor can draw. Each play, each production that the actor is associated with, will suggest a specific style that the actor must control with confidence. It might be that some productions imply a hybrid of more than one style — it is not that unusual to apply Stanislavskian principles to a play by Brecht or an Artaudian production. A play written in a particular period and in a style typical to that period might be reviewed and modified by a director to suit a fresh concept deemed relevant to a modern audience. The actor must be prepared to join the experiment in the knowledge that the stylistic techniques can be aptly applied with rigor.

All styles require the actor to apply the principal acting skills. The freedom of voice, speech and movement skills must be honed to suit any particular style, enabling the actor to make meaning clear to the audience.

### **Learning outcomes**

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know how to develop characterisation as an actor
- 2 Be able to develop performance work from a range of acting styles
- 3 Be able to rehearse material in a particular acting style
- 4 Be able to perform as an actor.

Learners must be assessed in at least two acting styles, each being demonstrated in the performance of a play or extract from a play lasting at least 10 minutes.

### **Unit content**

#### **1 Know how to develop characterisation as an actor**

Research and development: analysis of text to build character/role; improvisation; observation; research material to build information about character; *units and objectives analysis to build character's through-line*; communication with director and/or company to develop interpretation of the role

Skills and techniques: application and experimentation with movement; voice; gesture; emotional range and investment; interaction and responsiveness; adoption and application of appropriate acting style; use of space, use of time, use of weight, dynamics; inner and outer characteristics; consideration of function of characterisation

#### **2 Be able to develop performance work from a range of acting styles**

Acting styles: e.g. naturalism, realism, expressionism, surrealism, epic, Greek, choral and ensemble, melodrama, Restoration, Pre-Elizabethan, Elizabethan/Jacobean, grotesque, farce, physical or visual theatre, devised work, political, theatre of cruelty, theatre of the absurd

Practitioners: e.g. Strasberg, Brook, Brecht, Grotowski, Boal, Artaud, Mnouchkine, Littlewood, McBurney, Meckler, Alfreds, Berkoff, Lepage, Ninagawa

Practice: selected styles; interpretation of text and development of the role, isolating key features of the style

#### **3 Be able to rehearse material in a particular acting style**

Personal management: time management; schedules; physical preparation; mental preparation; use of actor's log; rehearsal props; costume and props; healthy and safe working practices; concentration and discipline; trust and cooperation; responsibilities; communication

Listening and response: taking direction; creative flexibility and generosity; use of rehearsal exercises and technique; group interaction, responding positively to feedback  
Growth and development: experiment and risk; engagement with the role; character decisions; extension and refinement; learning and memorising; sustained spontaneity  
Be able to perform as an actor

Physical expression: posture; gesture; tempo-rhythm; range and appropriateness of energy

Vocal expression: range and use of instrument; tone; pace; pitch; control; inflection; projection; register; dialect and accent

Emotional investment: commitment on stage; interaction and response; playing the moment; public solitude; use of emotional range; coherence and consistency of role; character journey; relationship with the audience

### **Essential guidance for tutors**

#### **Delivery**

This unit should use practical workshop classes to develop the learners' understanding of a range of acting styles. Throughout these workshops the learners should be introduced to at least two styles and a key practitioner in this area, and be given opportunities to explore these styles in a guided manner. Learners should be encouraged to develop their understanding of these styles through applying them in both controlled and independent ways to their rehearsal and creative processes.

The rehearsals will mostly be tutor-led and directed, although from the early stages learners should be made aware, via the structure of the classes, that there is a great deal of individual preparation work that an actor has to undertake outside the rehearsal room. Direction at this level, and for this unit's objectives, is largely about enabling learners to ask the right sorts of questions of a text and a character, and then realising the decisions and the answers in practical playing. Skills in interpretation should also encompass consideration of the appropriate performance style for different types of text. Learners should have time in class to work as individuals, but most of the work will be group based. It is often valuable for learners to observe others from the same group rehearsing other scenes and sharing the ensemble creative process. Opportunities to watch professional performance should also be built into the delivery of this unit, and learners should be encouraged to use analysis and discussion to inform their development as performers.

Learners should keep an actor's log that is guided, so that it becomes a useful working tool, not just a descriptive diary. In order to maximise the value of the creative log, learners should be encouraged to develop their skills in recognising the strengths and weaknesses in their practical work and setting objectives for improvement of skills. Preparatory work, such as the results of off-text improvisations, selected findings from research and biographical sketches of character, should all appear in the log, together with a final reflective evaluation of the performance.

The performances should be to a live audience, but not necessarily in a formal theatrical setting: other staff and learners who understand the workshop 'in progress' nature of this work may be a more appropriate audience than the general public.

#### **Assessment**

Evidence for this unit will be generated both in practical workshop classes and in rehearsed performance, underpinned by appropriate research and textual analysis. Evidence will focus on the performance and will be primarily through teacher statement, supported by video/DVD recording. Evidence for the research and rehearsal phase will be in the form of an actor's log which will document the investigations, theoretical and experiential, carried out on character roles. The log should conclude an evaluation of the assessed performance. Although this log will generally be written, learners should be encouraged to use a range of supporting material and to express their creative process

in a personal manner. In order to support a range of learners' needs, it may be appropriate to consider different methods of collating the evidence, such as video/DVD diary, viva voce, discussion groups. Further evidence of learners' working processes and creative contribution to the performance will be in the form of teacher statement, either contained in the feedback given to the learner, in an interim recorded feedback session, or through the use of observation reports on the learners' work. It may also be appropriate to consider the use of video/DVD recording, to provide evidence at key stages during the rehearsal process.

The unit requires the learners to research and have practical evidence of work on at least two acting styles. The performance work may be devised but there should be a finished text from which to work. Text can be taken to mean any source from which an actor can work and is not limited to conventional script. Where learners create and work from a devised text, the devising process itself should not form part of the assessed evidence for this unit.

### **Essential resources**

Learners are their own resource for this unit. They will require a practical studio space in which to work, and video equipment will be needed for evidence recording purposes. An appropriate range of texts and supporting research material is required and the learner should also have access to the internet for research purposes. Learners should have access to the production means to perform work to an audience under 'work in progress' studio conditions, e.g. appropriate rehearsal props and costumes, although these are needed only insofar as they enable the actor to realise a role to its full potential. The opportunity to see live professional performances in the style of the work(s) being prepared for performance is another vital resource.

### **Indicative reading for learners**

Boal A — Games for Actors and Non Actors (Routledge, 2002)  
 Callow S — Being an Actor (Vintage, 2004)  
 Hodge A — Twentieth Century Actor Training (Routledge, 1999)  
 Nunn T — The Actor and the Text (Virgin, 2000)  
 Sher A — Year of the King (Nick Hern, 2004)  
 Stanislavski C — An Actor's Handbook (Routledge, 2004)

## **UNIT 26: APPROACHES TO DIRECTING FOR THEATRE** **NQF Level 3: BTEC National Guided learning hours: 60**

### **Unit abstract**

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the director has become the key figure in drama and theatre production. The director is seen as responsible for the artistic vision of the production and for the interpretation of the text. This means that directors have a huge and exciting amount of responsibility, so they must be well informed in a large number of areas. They must feel secure in being able to develop an overall vision.

Directors need to know how to work with a team to achieve that vision. They must develop the ability to organise complex activities and the personal qualities to deal with actors and members of the production team. A director should also be able to develop

a directorial style, conceive a production in terms of style and then set about making it work in reality with a group of actors, designers and technicians.

The aim of this unit is to introduce aspiring young directors to the range of knowledge required to enable them to set off confidently on the complicated route to being an experienced and accomplished director. The unit covers the elements of style, historical production context, interpretation and directorial approach, by enabling the learner to experience different plays and the theories of key practitioners. An important element of the unit is applying theory to practice: learners have the opportunity to apply their knowledge by taking on practical work in the rehearsal room, discovering how to realise their ideas in a real-life situation, working with actors and a performance space, and with the appropriate stage equipment and technology.

### **Learning outcomes**

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the influence of production context in theatre
- 2 Understand the role of the theatre director
- 3 Be able to direct a short performance.

Learners will be assessed on their awareness of at least two production styles in relation to a play that represents each style. Learners must also prove their familiarity with at least two significant practitioners. Learners must direct one short performance.

### **Unit content**

#### **1 Understand the influence of production context in theatre**

Style: production styles, e.g. naturalism/realism, epic theatre, tragedy, comedy of manners, farce, melodrama, musical theatre, mixed media

Historical production context: a knowledge of at least two types of playing conditions, e.g. Classical Greek/Roman theatre, medieval mystery cycles, Elizabethan/Jacobean, Restoration, late eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century music hall, twentieth-/twenty-first-century West End, repertory, studio and fringe, street, guerrilla theatre

#### **2 Understand the role of the theatre director**

Significant practitioners: e.g. Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud, Brook, Craig, Boal, Simon McBurney, Pina Bausch or any contemporary director with a distinctive working method

#### **3 Be able to direct a short performance**

Direct in a particular style: awareness of directorial style; communication with actors and the production team; off-text exercises and activities; exploration of text; movement and vocal exercises; improvisation; use of space; props; design elements

Short performance: scenes or extracts, e.g. British, European, American or world drama, devised pieces

### **Essential guidance for tutors**

#### **Delivery**

In the early stages of this unit it will be important to develop learners' knowledge. They will need to learn the significant features of the playing conditions of different periods, relating these conditions to the features of the associated texts.

For example, the text of *Romeo and Juliet*, with its fast-changing scenes and the requirement for a balcony and a bed, may be related to the playing conditions of the Elizabethan theatre. Learners should be encouraged to see and discuss the opportunities and limitations of particular stage forms. Visits, either actual or virtual, to theatres which have preserved or replicated historical playing conditions will be valuable. Learners should experiment in workshop situations with different stage forms and playing conditions, gaining experience of how the spaces, stage features and actor-audience relationships may work in practice. At all stages learners should be encouraged to watch live performances in a variety of venues. Visits to local theatres or arts centres to study and evaluate the performance spaces will also be a useful activity.

*Tutors may opt to study two significant practitioners in detail with the whole group of learners, or may encourage choice by enabling individual learners to select and research practitioners.* It is worth bearing in mind that researching the work of directors is not always easy and that learners will need support to find relevant materials, which may include specific websites associated with individual directors and reviews of particular productions. The emphasis should be on the director's intentions and working methods.

Once learners can identify a range of features and directorial choices in relation to the staging of a play, they should study and work on specific texts from different eras, chosen to demonstrate contrasts in playing conditions and styles. Activities will vary with the specific texts, but all learners should have the opportunity to direct, probably working with their peers. As directors, they will need to prepare rehearsals and be clear about their intentions and their working methods. Feedback from both peers and tutors will be important in enabling learners to reflect on the process of directing and being directed and to evaluate their achievement.

This process will then be further developed when learners undertake their own small-scale directing project. The choice of texts or material will need to be carefully negotiated with an eye to the available human, time, space and technical resources. It may be useful to establish small working groups in which the roles of director and actors are rotated. Tutors will need to spend time monitoring and supporting those learners operating as directors, ensuring that their intentions are clear and that rehearsal sessions are planned.

### **Assessment**

The evidence will be in the form of collated information and research related to chosen historical periods, directors and texts, together with a director's file associated with the practical work undertaken. This will be supplemented by tutor observation of rehearsals and of final productions. Feedback from peers involved in the process may also provide evidence.

Learners should submit written and visual material demonstrating the information they have gained in classroom sessions and their own research and practical sessions. This will enable them to reflect on the practical application of their knowledge.

The director's file should contain material relevant to the process of directing the particular scene and should provide clear evidence of the chosen directorial methods and style, demonstrating in written notes and visual representations (stage plans, storyboards, etc.) how the director intends to put their intentions into practice. There should be a minimum of two performers in the cast, but to explore some directorial styles a larger cast may be more appropriate.

### **Essential resources**

Learners will need access to adequate rehearsal spaces and to a performance area in which lighting, sound and set elements can play their part in realising a directorial concept. This will necessitate some technical support. A range of properties and basic costumes will also be necessary. Learners need access to a range of scripts from which they may choose.

### **Indicative reading for learners**

Ayckbourn A — *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (Faber, 2002)

Brook P — *The Empty Space* (Touchstone, 1996)

Delgado and Heritage (editor) — *In Contact with the Gods?* (MUP, 1996)

Irvin P — *Directing for the Stage* (RotoVision, 2003)

Mitter and Shevtsova (editor) — *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (Routledge, 2005)

Unwin S — *So You Want to Be a Theatre Director?* (Nick Hern Books, 2004)

## Section Four: Teaching Stanislavski within a BTEC Curriculum (Case Study)

*Anthony Dalnas, Curriculum Leader in the School of Arts, Media and Performance at Blackpool and The Fylde College, describes the work at his college as the third case study for the research project. The college offers Further Education courses and Higher Education programmes in association with Lancaster University.*

The BTEC qualification in all its guises is intended for a wide range of students who wish to pursue vocational practices either for direct placement in their specific industry sector, or more commonly for progression to higher level training, whether it be within the same BTEC family of qualifications, i.e. from Award to Certificate to National Diploma to Higher National Diploma, or further progression onto non-BTEC qualifications such as Foundation Degrees and BA (Hons) level programmes. Whatever the level of qualification within the BTEC family the focus is the same, as succinctly outlined in the Edexcel Overview for BTEC Nationals which expresses that the learner is provided with a ‘practical real-world approach to learning [structured] alongside a theoretical background’<sup>19</sup>

This BTEC ethos sits well with the vocational practices of actor training and bares close similarity to the curriculum design that drama schools and a number of university-related programmes adopt. Therefore, it is widely felt by those teaching in the FE sector (evidenced through my discussions with colleagues at a number of institutions) that there is a natural synergy and logical transition between Performing Arts-related FE & HE programmes. The design enables FE delivery teams to select Specialist Units from a number of strands from the BTEC Qualification Specification so that they can comprise, in effect, a tailor-made curriculum that relates to the specific areas for which their programmes are intended, whether they are acting-, dance- or musical theatre-focussed. This places the delivery team at the heart of the programme design and enables the collaborators to develop a specific structure that not only draws on the expertise of the deliverers but, furthermore, is intended to equip learners with the requisite skills to successfully meet the current requirements for entry onto higher level training.

Though this structure provides many benefits, due to its flexibility it can also produce some discrepancies as there is little standardisation regarding the delivery of Units selected and/or the selection of Units that form the complete curriculum. Though specific guidance is given via the Unit abstract and delivery notes, there is still a good deal of autonomy for lecturers regarding, not only what theories and practices are studied, but also how these in turn are delivered.

I audition hundreds of students for places onto our BA(Hons) in Musical Theatre and Acting degree programmes, and I have been surprised just how inconsistent the knowledge and practical skills base is from student to student and how the experience of learners differs from one institution to the next. As we run HE programmes we are

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid*



fortunate enough to be able to align the curriculum design of our own BTEC National Diploma so that there may be more effective grounding in specific theories and practices that are necessary in order to meet the requisite criteria for entry onto our own and similar-level provision. Close consultation between FE and HE teams has ensured that there is greater relevancy in the curriculum structure so that there is improved synergy between levels. To that end we are working closely with a number of FE institutions to establish similar progression links in order to equip performing arts deliverers with firmer understanding and insight of the specific content and expectations of HE level programmes.

### **The BTEC Syllabus**

The recent addition of the BA (Hons) degree provision at Blackpool & The Fylde College has played a key role in the design and delivery of our own BTEC National syllabus. This collaboration has resulted in a more specific logic in the selection of Units and provided a more focussed approach in the delivery of theories and practices.

No acting approach plays a greater role in our BTEC syllabus than that associated with Konstantin Stanislavski. The ethos of the 'system' provides an integral foundation that underpins much of the creative work explored throughout the two years of the programme, whether it relates to specific acting technique or a general code of practice.

Out of the 5 core Units and 13 Specialist Units that comprise our National Diploma I would approximate that at least 12 place attention in some way on the principles of the 'system'. The areas which offer greater focus of the work of Stanislavski fall into two Units of our syllabus: *Principles of Acting* and *Applying Acting Styles*. These Units are studied over two years and on completion aim to provide learners with a firm grounding in some of the key theories and practices associated with Stanislavski. Through *Applying Acting Styles*, first year students are introduced to a number of the general principles that form the basis of the 'system' such as *imagination, relaxation, concentration, belief and inner motive forces*. The practical focus of this Unit establishes important foundation for more complex and specific study of the core principles such as *given circumstances, magic if, units, objectives, tactics, super-objectives, emotion memory and psychophysical approaches*. A number of these principles are studied toward the end of the first year but most are investigated in year two. This is due in part to the complexities of the techniques that perhaps necessitate deeper analysis to realise their effect, but moreover, due to the personal nature of some of the work that requires a good degree of emotional and physical commitment, control and risk-taking. We have discovered that these specific qualities are more effectively harnessed by learners once there is a good deal of trust established within the cohort. This clearly takes time as there is a settling in period that establishes mutual respect and clearly defined personal parameters so that each member is firmly valued as an equal stake-holder within the group. Therefore, the aim of the first year is not only to develop the qualities outlined above, but to establish an integral foundation of Stanislavski's 'system' that becomes the catalyst for more of the specific work on realising and developing character and performance studied more stringently in year two.

It is generally felt by the FE delivery team that learners initially need to be exposed to a philosophy that nurtures and encourages creativity with limited boundaries, a structure that promotes a sense of fun, naiveté or 'le jeu' [playfulness or play] as Jacques LeCoq

would exhort. Overburdening learners too soon with complex study and critical analysis of their creative endeavours perhaps only serves to further promote self-consciousness which consequently may stifle any artistic expression.

In the first year learners are helped to overcome inhibitions and encouraged to trust their own instinct and embrace artistic freedom in their explorations. This is motivated through a variety of means to help learners to unlock their potential and to establish *faith* in their artistic exploits. Work on *imagination* is key in this approach as it fosters creativity and originality; *relaxation* promotes ease and efficiency of physical actions and brings awareness to habitual tensions that arise when one is self-conscious so that more natural and organic responses can be developed; *concentration* motivates ideas and informs creative decisions that absorb the actor in the world of the play; *belief* plays a fundamental part in the whole process without which work has little integrity or genuine purpose; and finally, the *inner motive forces*, the triumvirate of the mind, will and feeling, are the essential ingredients that drive all artistic endeavours and are the basis for the entire 'system'.

These principles are comprehensively explored and developed through the *Applying Acting Styles* Unit and form the core of the first year of training. Classes focus on learning-by-doing, therefore there is strong emphasis on developing knowledge and skills through constant practice. The work is further compounded through debate via both mentor and peer-to-peer feedback before further exploration is undertaken. The *Principles of Acting* Unit further assists in providing theoretical context of the practices investigated. Through this unit learners closely analyse the influences and key features of the genres that are studied throughout the course of the two years.

Learners normally investigate technique through a range of scenarios which are predominately improvised to help develop spontaneity, intuition and work from self. Usually the team will focus on topics that bare specific relevancy to the age and experience of the cohort so that all learners feel able to contribute. Importantly, it also encourages notions of truth and sincerity in their practical work as they are able to assess the validity and integrity of dramatic choices against their own personal experiences. Through peer-to-peer review, learners are encouraged to analyse and question their work in order to develop reasoning and greater specificity in their approach. This undoubtedly places the work in a much more personal context which is an important step in developing ownership and autonomy. It also serves to highlight the need for drama to be contextualised so that there is firmer understanding of the prevailing issues and themes within dramatic works. Furthermore, it raises the importance that creative endeavours need to be considered in order to maintain a level of integrity which respectfully addresses and fulfils the playwright's intentions.

The structure and chronology of Stanislavskian techniques developed in the first year seem to fit together well as learners are equipped with requisite skills to support and enable creative decision making either through improvised or scripted material. Importantly it also instils a level of confidence in their abilities and establishes a code of practice that forms the foundation for more specific work on character and text. Recent discussions with first year students who have been rehearsing the play '*Thatcher's Women*' by Kate Adshead<sup>20</sup> support the above notions. They expressed that the initial

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20 Published in *Plays by Women*, Vol.7.( London: Methuen 1988)

work covered on the 'system' has had significant impact on their learning. The majority felt that the techniques had given them greater understanding of their creative potential and instilled much needed confidence in their approach. They posited that the skills acquired in the first two terms of their programme enabled them to dissect scripted material with assurance and assisted in developing and realising character and performance with a degree of precision. They agreed that preliminary exploration on imagination, concentration and belief was key in order to secure a firm understanding of the more complex 'system' approaches. Furthermore, it was discussed that these initial principles provided them with the beginnings of a codified system that established a tangible set of skills in which to generate performance work - skills they felt they didn't possess prior to starting the programme. They also suggested that elements of the 'system' provided them with a working ethos that could be utilised across a range of dramatic styles and creative disciplines. Dancers and singers within the group expressed that they realised the significance of much of the work when generating performances within their particular fields. They highlighted that they imported a good deal of the 'system approaches' into other Units studied on the programme and recognised that many of the principles attributed to Stanislavski work for a range of practices not necessarily associated with Realism and Naturalism.

What a good proportion of the first year instils through Stanislavski's 'system' is a universal code of practice that provides the basis for more complex and personal work on emotional and physical approaches studied later in the curriculum. It is felt that the skills associated with this area of the work are rarely developed with precision and confidence by the learners without first establishing an ethos that forms the life-vein of all the other component parts. For example, it is difficult to play objectives with sincerity or justification if learners are unaware of the notion of *belief* in what they are doing. Likewise it is difficult to exist within the present-tense of a scene if actors are not first taught how to *concentrate*, similarly it is difficult to maintain focus if not *relaxed* or the world of the play is not *imagined*. There is a kind of symbiotic relationship between the different elements that comprise the 'system'. That is why it is important learners understand that the component parts fit together and feed into one another rather than being studied in isolation without essential and necessary reference to the whole.

It is only recently that we have realised this notion, due in part to the re-design of the FE curriculum and from input from the HE delivery team who have consulted with the lecturers to establish a more effective approach. The results have been progressive and it is evident that students now have a firmer grasp of the principles of the 'system' both in theory and practice. Recent discussion with learners has highlighted a positive shift in line with the principles mentioned above. I was somewhat surprised by the level of knowledge first-year students had of the 'system' and how much more confident they appeared in their application of the associated skills. They understood and recognised the need for work to have integrity and justification and, furthermore, appreciated the level of commitment required to maintain credible performances.

More complex skills are studied during the final term of the first year which are developed and explored further in year two of the programme. Learners begin to hone their creative responses to a range of text utilising principles investigated during the initial phases of their training to help support and realise more complex skills developed within the second year. They will begin to analyse text much more closely, exploring

techniques such as *objectives*, *tactics*, *adaptation*, *super-objectives*, and *units* to help interpret the playwright's intentions and realise clues pertaining to character and performance.

*Objectives* and *tactics* play a key role in developing learners' ability to realise the motivational qualities of the roles they undertake. A good deal of time is spent investigating these principles through workshop sessions using a variety of approaches. Initially they are investigated through improvisation with scenarios established by the lecturer. What is of little benefit to learners at this stage in order to understand and appreciate the nature of *objectives* is to forgo its counterpart: the *tactic*. These important transitive verbs, also known as active verbs, are essential in realising the actions required that may assist in achieving the established goal. Without the much needed tactic, objectives tend to remain a theoretical concept that leaves participants somewhat inert. Jean Benedetti's research on 'acts of communication' has been of great benefit in activating and motivating tactics and is an approach that is widely used by the delivery team to help learners understand the varying nature of human *interaction* and communication.<sup>21</sup> This work has been essential as it has assisted in providing learners with greater insight into the myriad of ways in which we interact in life to help facilitate both conscious and unconscious goals. Importantly, the work associated with communication also provides greater insight of the tactical choices that can be played in order to actively motivate learners and their chosen objectives. Emphasis is placed on three principles of communication, *verbal*, *gestural* and *mental* to help realise and motivate dramatic decisions and to help focus and align established objectives to the intended 'object of attention'. Learners have greatly benefited from this work due perhaps to the obvious and analogous nature of these principles to real-life interface. Of the three modes, *gestural* is studied more comprehensively due to it contributing the largest proportion of human interaction. Our learners spend a good deal of time exploring physical approaches to tactics to help breathe life into the objectives that first motivated them. This approach helps to physically navigate and expose the learner's intention as it engages them much more actively and coherently as objectives are played 'out' rather than retained simply as a cerebral process.

My discussions with the second year cohort highlighted how important and beneficial the work outlined above has been for them. They expressed that initial study and practice of objectives and tactics has not only supported their understanding of scripted work but has given them greater awareness of how to actively respond to it. A number additionally stated that they felt somewhat intimidated at the prospect of working on text due to personal academic insecurities. However, they expressed that objectives and techniques similarly associated gave them tangible skills in which to help decipher and tackle scripted material with a degree of confidence. The group further highlighted that work on *units* was also beneficial and key in helping to breakdown material into manageable bits to gain greater insight and understanding.

Further discussion with the group about their experiences swiftly led to the *psychophysical* work of the programme which pre-occupied Stanislavski in the latter part of his life. They posited that the physical work incorporated in their training was extremely useful in helping them to connect naturally and organically to emotion rather than the more difficult and dare I say contentious work of *emotion memory*, hence this initial area of the 'system' being rarely adopted by members of the delivery team. The

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21 Benedetti, Jean. *Stanislavski and The Actor*, (London:Routledge, 1998) pp74-79

psychophysical aspects of our programme provides a more logical and tangible approach for learners which is much more accessible.

All the specific work on Stanislavski studied over the two years of the programme are consolidated at intervals either through scene study presentations or through work on full-scale projects studied through Units such as *Performance Workshop*, *Rehearsing for Performance* and *Performing to an Audience*. Learners are obviously assessed on a number of learning outcomes which focus in the main on their ability to develop and sustain work with consideration, control and a good degree of independent creative artistry – prerequisites that form the basis for which most of programme is assessed. It is therefore hard, I feel, to ignore Stanislavski due to his fundamental work on actor training which provides skills by which to achieve the essential criteria noted above. His philosophy is key in supporting and establishing a codified 'system' that is both reliable and effective.

## Section Five: Teaching Stanislavski in Higher Education University-based BA Degree Programmes

*This section of the report is written by Philip Weaver, Head of BA Acting at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts at the time of this research and now Head of BA Acting at E15 Acting School. It records the outcome of the author's discussions with four drama lecturers, all teaching on 3-year BA Drama or Performance degree courses in universities. They represent both new and old university departments. The participants were: Dr Dominic Symonds, University of Portsmouth; Emma Gersch, Teaching Fellow, Bath Spa University; Professor Vivien Gardner, University of Manchester and Professor Robert Gordon, Goldsmiths, University of London.*

The discussions centred on five key questions:

- What are the main current features of Stanislavski-based work within the university department?
- Does the study of Stanislavski provide a relevant methodology for twenty-first century theatre practice?
- Does the study of Stanislavski at pre-degree level impact upon the department's teaching?
- To what extent does wider research and teaching activity, based on Stanislavski, enhance acting and teaching practice?
- What resources would bring about greater alignment of research and practice in this field?

### **What are the main current features of Stanislavski-based work within your university department?**

Responses to this question fell into two groups: new and old universities. The two new university lecturers interviewed use Stanislavski as foundation training. They approach the study of Stanislavski-based work holistically, and obviously regard it as vital.

Dominic Symonds, at Portsmouth, explained:

*Level 2 students, in their first semester, really engage with Stanislavski in detail ... then proceed to a theoretical course, a two-hour seminar every week, gradually going through the Stanislavski process.*

And Emma Gersch, at Bath Spa, said that Stanislavski's methods:

*... form quite a significant foundation for the training: the performing arts programme is underpinned by what is called an in-house method ... that is absolutely rooted in Stanislavski...the first-years are trained in this quite intensively.*

Gersch also gave an in-depth breakdown of the exact process that the students are taken through:

*Once they have divided text into units of action they are asked to find a Parallel ... this parallel being 'memory recall' or 'sense memory' ... getting closer to the experience of whatever it is.*

By contrast, both Robert Gordon at Goldsmiths and Viv Gardner at Manchester, teach Stanislavski's ideas as comparative study, alongside other work that usually focuses on contemporary theatre and progressive theatre styles. Interestingly, Robert Gordon drew attention to the difference between the teaching at vocational drama schools and the university courses:

*... acting as transformation is the bit that is taught more minimally ... we have to distinguish ourselves from the traditional drama schools.*

However, despite these reservations, students at Goldsmiths are introduced to Stanislavski as a matter of course and are routinely given the opportunity for further exploration:

*... they do 5-week workshops ... they have to make something at the end ... I wouldn't sell this as training ... they have to know what is the method of physical action, they have to know how to get there, they have to know the stages.*  
(Gordon)

Thus it seems that at Goldsmiths it is still judged important to understand the Stanislavskian process, even though other performance practices are more central to the course.

*It is probably the kind of training a director should have rather than a performer.*  
(Gordon)

Significantly, Gordon suggested that the majority of students graduating from the Goldsmiths course will become theatre-makers and not actors. Should they want to be actors, he recommends that they take further training after their degree:

*... the Goldsmiths ethos is to start with radical theatre movements rather than training realistically for the profession ... it is good, I think, in provoking students who will go to be making, to be devising and to be using theatre.*

Similarly, at Manchester, as Viv Gardner suggested, there is a fairly congruent pattern, in that Stanislavski:

*... is referred to, not specifically taught, as part of a second-year, core course, which is called Practitioners in Context; but orientation on that course is largely on, I suppose, the radical and the avant-garde ...*

However, of all four university departments questioned, Manchester appears to have the least emphasis on teaching Stanislavski. Here it is not part of the central core of the department's work:

*... they deal with Chekhov and the Moscow Arts Theatre, Stanislavski is obviously part of that, but there is less emphasis on Stanislavski's approach, more on the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and responses to that.* (Gardner)

Emerging from the responses to this question is a clear distinction between the attitudes and approaches of the new and old universities. The new tend to use Stanislavski as integral to their teaching; the old refer to him as just another practitioner. Both the old universities at some point stress that their ethos is not centred on vocational training, whereas, at the new universities, neither Dominic Symonds (Portsmouth) nor Emma Gersch (Bath Spa) point to any distinction between vocational theatre training and their own courses in terms of teaching Stanislavski.

### **Does the study of Stanislavski provide a relevant methodology for twenty-first-century theatre practice?**

*... all current performance practice comes from at least a foundation of that sort of Stanislavskian technique, or a turn against it.* (Symonds)

All four lecturers agreed that the study of Stanislavski provides, to a greater or lesser extent, a relevant methodology for twenty-first-century theatre practice. However, they all referred also to essential links between television or film acting, naturalism and Stanislavski.

Gersch, at Bath Spa, made the connection with Stanislavski and the notion of truth in performance in a broad sense, rather than in a specific approach to character.

*I absolutely believe that theatre today, if we look beyond training, has an absolute necessity to root itself in truth, and connect its actor with the story they are telling and why and what its resonance is for them. I use the word resonance a lot because if something is vibrating with an actor it tends to produce a better performance.*

By contrast, Symonds, Gordon and Gardner share a similar ideology in that they referred to the teaching and practice of Stanislavski as a television or film technique.

*... the legacy that we have been left with of twentieth-century theatre practice is very much based in that idea of Naturalism ... ninety percent of film acting and television acting have come out of it as well, so I think it is difficult to escape from that sort of Stanislavskian ideal.* (Symonds)



Symonds then went on to say:

*On the other hand, and particularly over the last thirty years, I think people have increasingly tried to escape the expectations of Naturalism and the idea of behaviour somehow being performance. I think that that has ultimately led to more exciting, more interesting, a more theatrical performance ... than perhaps we would get if we maintained that sort of strong focus on Stanislavski.*

Gordon commented:

*... I always say, don't assume that a Brecht play would work if you systematically follow Stanislavski, because there will be moments where you realise that the two approaches are in conflict ... if you are working in television, great! Use your Stanislavski technique.*

He went further to suggest that Stanislavski is fundamental to American film and television:

*I would say it is vital to have a knowledge of Stanislavski in this day and age, not just because it affects American practice in all sorts of different ways, not that all American practice is pure Stanislavski. ... there is so much of the tradition around the world of good training, good rehearsal practice, which is either Stanislavskian- or Michael Chekhov- or Meisner-based ... because Stanislavski asked all the basic questions for the modern actor.*

Viv Gardner explained:

*A lot of the students understand things very broadly in a naturalistic situation ... I co-ordinate the work that is done by the Royal Exchange ... writing for the performance course ... embedded in that is the understanding, very much a naturalistic approach to performance ... I think it is based partly on their experiences in certain areas of television production and performance, and film performance, which is sort of very loosely based on Naturalism and Realism ... the Exchange tries to move students away from that writing, so as not to write things that would be built on emotional memory, in terms of character construction and things like that.*

To reiterate, the common ground here lies in all four lecturers' usage of the term 'Naturalism', and in the idea that Stanislavskian methodology is in some way explicitly linked to television and film acting and therefore relevant.

### **Does the study of Stanislavski at pre-degree level impact upon the department's teaching?**

*We've done Stanislavski! (Symonds)*

Without exception, all four lecturers agree that a significant impact is created by the teaching of Stanislavski at pre-degree level, none of which is positive:

*... I am afraid it is more a question of unlearning the bad habits that the students have been introduced to. (Symonds)*

Loosely, there appear to be three strands of thought on the negative effects of pre-degree study; firstly, the self-indulgence of teenagers and the resultant misinterpretation of 'emotional memory'; secondly, the issue of bad translation or interpretation of Stanislavski's work and finally, the common belief that Stanislavski methodology constitutes 'method' acting: this may be because A-level deals exclusively with his early work.

With specific reference to 'self indulgence', Dominic Symonds was asked if he thought students frequently substituted themselves for the character.

*Yes, absolutely ... previous translations of Stanislavski perpetuate the emotional memory and self-indulgence ... the new Benedetti translation is very refreshing.*

This viewpoint was supported by Emma Gersch:

*... they also have some negative preconceptions about method acting, which is particularly unhelpful - Daniel Day Lewis living in a forest, for example.*

These shared views crucially identify the strong link between Stanislavski and 'method' acting which is taught at A-level: at this stage there seems to be no teaching or reference to Stanislavski's later work.

Emma Gersch went further and added:

*I have taught Stanislavski at pre-degree level ... it is taught in quite a stodgy way and I do not know if there is any experiential teaching of it ... they come with labels and preconceptions and show off the fact they can pronounce the name...it has not lodged anywhere, in fact I have found I have had to work quite hard to free them of the stigma ... they've ticked that off in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their BTEC ... controversially I would rather it wasn't touched, I don't think they're ready for it because so much of Stanislavski is based on students having a resource and feeling and knowledge ...*

Viv Gardner was also very specific about the problems that she encounters, especially with reference to other practitioners taught at pre-degree level:

*... one of the things that we struggle with is the binary that is set up by A-level teaching between Stanislavski and Brecht.*

Robert Gordon described a particular student who claimed that they knew the work of Stanislavski prior to enrolling at Goldsmiths:

*... what they had been taught as Stanislavski had been very early- Stanislavski work on relaxation and breathing and concentration etc. ... it had been all the introspective stuff that becomes part of Strasberg ... she had done nothing of what we know from the later Stanislavski and yet she had been convinced because she had been taught quite didactically obviously at A-level that they had done Stanislavski, and that it was ludicrous that I was at university bothering in the second year to start them off on Stanislavski.*

This is indisputable evidence of the disparity between the teaching of Stanislavski at A-level and the degree-level teaching of his work and methodology. They appear to conflict at base level.

### **To what extent does research and teaching activity, based on Stanislavski, enhance acting and teaching practice?**

Responses to this question showed a fairly uniform lack of research activity and awareness of debate in this area, with perhaps the exception of Bath Spa University. Emma Gersch explained that she is

*... aware of only one in my department, my colleague is doing a PhD on physical theatre and how it is influenced by, not sure if it is specifically Stanislavski, this same method I have been talking about here ... how it impacts on physical impulse, movement, choreography, dance theatre ... that has become quite a sort of flavour of the department now ... the exploration of truthful impulse as pertaining to physical theatre and movement, urge-driven movement ...*

To the spontaneous question, ‘... so something stylized or more visually expressive?’, Gersch responded:

*... actually sort of moving away from the stylized and finding the same, using the same approach to character as you might with a piece of Shakespeare to a movement, an impulse-driven, urge-driven movement ...*

Robert Gordon at Goldsmiths was unable to identify any other formal research in this area apart from his own teaching work.

Dominic Symonds said: *... this is not an area of my expertise*, but he added that *... there is a lot of research going on about performance in general*. Viv Gardner said: *... this is something that we are not doing at present at Manchester ... and the teaching is pretty minimal*.

The finding of this part of the enquiry is that although all four departments teach Stanislavski, they don’t seem to share any of the results of their teaching with other university departments. Moreover, any formal research that might be ongoing in this area is not widely known. Therefore any possible enhancement of Stanislavski-based practice by research seems to be minimal. Likewise teaching is inconsistent.

### **What resources would bring about greater alignment of research in this field?**

There is some evidence that research and investigation into the work of Stanislavski is perceived as marginal by young academics and scholars:

*I think that the answer is current staffing ... it isn't that we are against the idea of somebody working in that area at all ... it's sort of fundamental, however, I think our experience of recent appointments, there aren't many people out there amongst the sort of early career researchers who are working on Stanislavski.*  
(Gardner)

Emma Gersch strengthened this argument further:

*... the tension that we are experiencing at the moment is that less and less of our new staff coming in to the department want to teach in this way, as in this in-house method which is rooted in Stanislavski. I think it is generally perceived as dated and irrelevant and hard and a bit didactic and scary ... the resistance to it has been quite noticeable, particularly in the rewriting of the degree programme and absolute sense of doing away with it, write it out ... lecturers that come in have their own interests, approaches.*

However, Robert Gordon feels that better opportunities for collaboration between drama schools and universities could enable greater alignment of both practice-based and theoretically-led research:

*... I am glad that your research is coming out of actor-training institutions ... you could expect work to come out of universities, theoretically on Stanislavski and alternative and complementary acting approaches ... I think that's almost the nub of the problem, because if you are working in a training school or conservatoire you are not necessarily expected to be researching and teaching. There is a gap, because those people who need to be able to apply the new research are usually in the conservatoires ... those people who may be expected to do the research are in universities ... there is no opportunity for me on my course to use some of my research work around this exhaustively, in working with actors on the floor, and it would be great because it could improve my research.*

Dominic Symonds at Portsmouth made a further point:

*Resources for drama and theatre studies in general are very London-centric ... in London there are lots of opportunities for students and scholars and practitioners to be able to engage with master-classes, workshops those sorts of things.*

Symonds was then asked: 'Do you feel that this is a real problem, or do you feel that students stand to benefit in any way from being outside London?'

His reply was:

*... it comes down to pedagogy ... all students benefit from supplementing the normal teaching of their resident lectures with expert and very specific master-class or workshop-based sessions ... the opportunity to be able to offer those*

*sorts of master-class sessions would be really useful. Lots of that comes down to financing of individual institutions and courses. I wonder whether bigger frameworks can be set up to help enable that.*

All the evidence suggests that the resource needed to promote research and bring about a greater alignment of research in this field is the opportunity (backed by funding) for co-operative work and study, involving partnerships between actor-training institutions and universities, in a combination and collaboration of theory and practice.

In conclusion, three ideas emerge clearly from these discussions: firstly, compared with older institutions, new universities seem to have a more practical approach to teaching drama and theatre studies, and also appear more likely to use Stanislavskian methodology extensively. This suggests that the more practical the teaching approach the more useful Stanislavski is.

Secondly, it appears to be broadly accepted that Stanislavski developed a methodology entirely distinct from other practitioners; albeit one that has informed many other practitioners and innovative theatre-makers. It is widely viewed as a separate, ex-centric study, with very specific perimeters.

This contradicts my own experience, both as practitioner and acting teacher, that the notion of isolating any one methodology, in order to enable the student actor on a practical level, is unsatisfactory. Each actor has to develop an individual approach, which can then easily be adapted to different styles of performance. In order to enable this flexibility, students need to be introduced to and synthesize a variety of methodologies, the most influential of which is often Stanislavski's.

Finally, the application of Stanislavski to current teaching is an area of practice that could usefully be re-addressed with the aim of greater communication between drama schools and universities. Failing this, the current compartmentalisation of Stanislavski's methods and techniques could well prove counterproductive to their continued relevance.

## Section Six: Teaching Stanislavski in Higher Education Conservatoire-based BA Acting Programmes

*Thomasina Unsworth interviewed four lecturers who teach on BA Acting programmes in CDT<sup>22</sup> accredited Higher Education Institutions known as Conservatoires or Drama Schools. She asked each of them to talk about teaching Stanislavski's ideas and asked whether they thought a study of Stanislavski provided a relevant methodology for twenty-first-century theatre practice?*

### **Amir Korangy, Director of the Acting Programme at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts**

The training at Mountview is underpinned by Stanislavskian principles but the actors are exposed to a number of practitioners. The training sets out a direction for actors to explore from rather than waves a magic wand over them. My own background stems from the Group Theatre and practitioners such as Uta Hagan and Sanford Meisner. But I want to stress that the training at Mountview isn't indoctrination, it is an organic, growing process. I am wary of becoming hooked on one way of working. Having said that there is a fundamental principle that the actors require a system that offers them the tools that they will need in the profession.

The starting point for the first year actor embarking on training is to understand and explore the use of their own personal resources, to carve tools out for themselves and to get a sense of themselves as individuals. The training focuses on the specifics of each individual; it assesses personal strengths and weaknesses. It also aims to give the actor an assessment of what the industry involves.

The second year progresses into integrating what has already been learnt with an understanding of the demands of a specific text. The focus is on how to approach a specific piece of text and then how to take that text into performance. It is rather like the way an expert would look at a room that needed work. In order to carry out the improvements the refurbisher would need to know what they were looking for; they would need to know what the room required, where the pipes were, what the shape needed etc. The actors have to be able to look at a text and understand similarly what it needed. For instance when working on a Restoration piece, the actor needs to understand the genesis of the material, whether the material was generated with a particular agenda in mind. The job of the practitioner is to explore that. The text is embedded in its historical context; this must be considered along with the accompanying social conditions. The actor must understand the content and design of the text and to trace it back in order to arrive at a style of performance. They cannot simply play a comment. They need to work on agility and wit and to understand the different modes of social expression. The truth of the characters is filtered through etiquette and the social context. The actor will be left with a residue from working in a particular way.

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<sup>22</sup> Founded in 1969, The Conference of Drama Schools comprises Britain's 22 leading Drama Schools. CDS exists in order to strengthen the voice of the member schools and to set and maintain the highest standards of training within the vocational drama sector. ([www.drama.ac.uk](http://www.drama.ac.uk))

You can't practice art without craft. You have to have the ability to be thorough. You must understand the function of the thing you are going to create. This way of working integrates with the bedrock of the work that explored personal resources. If the training has been expansive enough then the actor should be able to work out how to serve the text using different materials. If you are skilled then you can do different things because you can understand what is needed for specific projects.

We also look at Chekhov and Ibsen, and they are very different. Ibsen involves psychological realism and the use of logic is more readily available here. With Chekhov, theatrical conventions are sacrificed in order to expose a moment of truth in all its pathos and awkwardness. The story is left to fend for itself. It is not necessarily structured like a well-made play. The characters must deal with the stimuli floating in the air in that moment. They must find it by opening up to the moment. They need the confidence as actors to react to what comes at them.

We also look at Shakespeare, contemporary texts and kitchen sink drama as well as "turn of the century" work. In the third year actors are exposed to various aspects of media. We train them to do television and radio and learn techniques for film acting. They have to be able to draw on a diversity of skills. Stanislavski is hugely relevant to the work. By drawing on his system we train actors to consider their craft and to care about it. Such actors are passionate in not delivering regurgitations of truth. These actors can make discoveries in the moment, with an audience.

An artist needs to be able to tap in to a universal source, the Jungian archetypes of collective unconscious if you like. This sums up any sort of art form. Without that it is indulgent. Technically theatre is an artifice but it has its own truth.

### **David Zoob, Lecturer in Acting on the BA Acting degree at Rose Bruford College**

David begins by discussing a scene from *Possibilities* by Howard Barker.

This scene is set in what appears to be a medieval setting but Barker is deliberately a historical so there are deliberate inaccuracies and anachronisms. The torturer has come to a squalid inn and a youth who wants to murder him in revenge for torturing his mother is flattering his guest. The torturer then starts to talk about his job. I chose this because it encapsulates a lot of what Howard Barker is about and because of the challenges to the actor that are offered by the text. One of the things about it is that it is deliberately obscure. Barker doesn't always care if the audience gets it intellectually; they need to have a visceral experience as well as an intellectual one. Secondly the argument is very perverse it seems to be a challenge to our liberal instincts. It is good if you confess to terrible crime of malice or to a glorious crime of freedom because either way you are participating through your imagination in an act of extremity, an act that allows you to transgress your everyday life, to transform yourself in that brief moment of imagining. That absolutely encapsulates Barker's approach to theatre

making; an audience is forced through the torturer, the actor, to participate in their imagination in terrible events.

Barker's plays are often extremely violent, and Barker's objective is to, as it were, turn his audience inside out. So I suggested to one of the actors in my company to participate in a torture that seemed appropriate. I asked him to confess to something that he hadn't done, that he should confess to an appalling crime against a child and it did turn him inside out in the sense that his palms were cold and sweaty by the end of it, so was his forehead and he was visually shaken by the experience. He had experienced what Barker describes. You can say that that approach is an extension of Stanislavski's 'Magic If' but where it differs is in the absence of rationality. Stanislavski would, or at least Stanislavskian practitioners would, always ask actors to exist in given circumstances in which they may be driven to do this terrible thing. Here I have bypassed all that and got straight to the point. I've said you must now confess to something and the actor lives in his imagination without needing this rational process.

In *The Castle* by Howard Barker there is an example of a character who is overwhelmed by obsessive love in a way that is off the charts, in a way that doesn't have a justification in every day life, in normality. You couldn't say, "oh yes this character has this or that mental malfunction, she just happens to be a person whose intentions Barker wants to dramatize." The character is so full of obsessive love that their thoughts pour out of them in a way that wouldn't be considered necessarily logically consequential. In amongst all that you have Barker's characteristic bold type which indicates added intensity. Again this is Stanislavskian in a way, in that there are intentions being played but I would suggest that trying to clarify the character in relation to a character biography doesn't help and there is a tendency in the Stanislavskian approach, or in a way that people use his approach, to be over rational, so that everything is sequential and everything has a justification and this action leads to this action and it changes in relation to this obstacle and so on as the character pursues an objective. Here, in this text, the arrows are, as it were, veering off in different directions; the thoughts don't always move in sequence and they don't necessarily occupy the same universe; there are shifts from one thing to another and as in absurdist drama the character's thoughts will shift from an argument to a colour to a number to a sensation so the approach has to take into account something that is more irrational.

Stanislavski often talks about the super-objective of the play but he was also very critical of his own production of *The Lower Depths* by Gorky, where he said that the actors were so focused on their individual characters that the overarching political argument of the play did not communicate across the footlights. I think that Brecht took on this concern. The way I teach Brecht at Rose Bruford College is to say that he is embracing a lot of Stanislavskian ideas, but is saying how can we address the very problem that Stanislavski describes in relation to his production of *The Lower Depths*. So one feature of a Brechtian approach to dramaturgy is to dramatise individual choices that the characters make. Brecht talks about "the not ... but." The character does not do x but instead does y, so the actions are the product of a particular choice and that choice was arrived at as a consequence of that character's relationship with the environment they are living in and the



conditions of that environment. So the audience are drawn in to both the choice, which they can judge, and the social or economic or political conditions that gave rise to that choice. So the continuity of a Stanislavskian approach would be broken up when looking at Brecht as the actor is asked to open themselves intellectually and allow an audience into their thoughts as it were. They are there with an audience at those moments of choice. And I think that highlights the distinction to the approach that we take in the second year to that of the first.

When we have elucidated those moments of choice, what often happens as well, is that there are interactions between characters where one character may or may not accept an offer that is being made. "Do I accept this money? Do I accept this gift that is being given to me?" And often when I am working on *Mother Courage* on the scene where Yvette is trying to bribe the firing squad to spare the life of Mother Courage's son, I work on that scene almost as a series of snap shots in montage. I will say to the actors what I need to see now is you choosing this or considering this, so that all extraneous links that might be more comfortable or organic in a psychologically realist portrayal are removed, and we see in montage very clearly the mechanics of the decision making.

In a course of acting I would say that an internal awakening should happen first or at least that the inner life has to be explored. The second year work could not take place without that happening.

### **Jeremy Harrison, Programme Director for the BA degree in Actor Musicianship at Rose Bruford College.**

The musicality work that forms such a key element of the first year of the Actor Musicianship Programme draws directly on the ideas of Włodzimierz Staniewski and the work of Polish theatre company *Gardzienice* and then the development of these ideas as articulated through the work of Teatr Piesn Kozla and their director Grzegorz Bral. The guiding principle and fundamental idea is that no distinction is made between music, movement, text and voice. The actor moves effortlessly between these disciplines. In the case of both Staniewski and Bral the training work employed in their companies has resulted in a performance aesthetic. As I have interpreted it, however, it can be applied as part of the core developmental work of our first-year students. The root of the work can be found in Stanislavski's theories, in particular the method of physical action and his ideas on rhythm and tempo. This context enables us to apply the sensitivities developed through this work in a variety of ways including text work, the development of inner life and the building of character.

Our response to music bypasses the intellectual. It speaks to us directly. Stanislavski writes of finding a childlike state of openness, of the need for the actor to live in the moment. Through music an actor can remove the blocks that inhibit strong emotional connection and by defining his/her inner life as a musical landscape, the actor can explore the various musical manipulations needed to generate, extend and sustain that life.

Stanislavski articulated ideas on tempo and rhythm. He talks of a new teacher who came from the orchestra. The teacher set metronomes and the actors explored their responses to different rhythm and tempo. The class was asked to explore characters in relation to these. Stanislavski talks about the different responses to the driving pulse and how through these, dramatic characters can be explored and the text illuminated.

Essentially having worked with the Polish exercises for nearly ten years, I returned to Stanislavski and re-read him and realised that there was a lot of common ground. He makes a distinction between tempo and rhythm. One is the speed of physical action the other refers to inner life. In the Polish work they use 'rhythm circle' exercises, encouraging the ensemble to stamp out a rhythm. They repeat it and repeat it, embodying it, physicalising the musical idea until it generates inner responses. It looks and feels like ritual, but in a way it is replicating Stanislavski's exercises concerning the outer and inner rhythm.

One can work on different relationships to tempo, asking the actor to describe and explore the affect of tempo on their inner life. It becomes a means of shaping emotion. An idea like jealousy for example, may be manifest in different ways depending on the context: Juliet as a teenager, for example, may experience it as fast and sharp, whereas Othello as he enters Desdemona's bed chamber is probably working with a much stronger, slower inner tempo. This way the actor has means of realising and manipulating the psychological drives of the character. The work can be very powerful and offers an approach that is very effective in releasing young actors in the early stages of their training.

**Julian Jones, Lecturer in Acting on the BA Acting degree at Rose Bruford College.**

There is one class that I particularly remember from my time as a student actor at RADA in the 1980s; it stands out in stark contrast to the vagaries and generalisations of much of the training, at least as I experienced it back then. It was a class given by the actor/director/writer Ken Campbell who introduced us (pretty much in passing) to three terms: "objective", "obstacle" and "action." I can't remember whether he mentioned the name of Stanislavski or not; I suppose he must have done but I don't remember. What I do remember is the force with which these concepts struck me, even before attempting to put them into practice, because I felt, in a visceral rather than intellectual sense, that they would be of real practical use to me when I got up and tried to act. These three ideas, along with the notion of "given circumstances" (which I must have absorbed at some point, though was never formally taught), gradually, intuitively and through practical trial and error, became the indispensable foundation for my own independent process as an actor for the next twenty years. This was the case not because I revered Stanislavski – I didn't read his or anybody else's books on the theory of acting until much later - but because it was simple, reliable and effective. It became the basis of my approach to acting because it made sense to me as an actor - because it was, in other words, useful in a practical way.

There is a reason that the approaches of Stanislavski - like those, for instance, of Michael Chekhov and Sanford Meisner - have endured and continue to occupy the foreground in actor training into the twenty-first century, which is, I believe, of key importance. They were all, first and foremost, actors themselves and the wellspring of their need to formulate theory came from their practical endeavours. Their techniques carry a conviction that is forged through the effort of 'doing'. The motivational force that caused both Stanislavski and Chekhov to continually reformulate their ideas, to express those ideas with ever-greater lucidity, was the need to 'do' it, better. While academics and directors formulate theory based on what they experience from the 'outside', from what they see (also valid of course), for actors like Stanislavski theory crystallises slowly (and often painfully) from the 'inside', through the process of 'doing'.

The danger has been that the ideas of Stanislavski and those that followed in his wake have been hardened into 'laws' or 'rules', and their appropriation by various factions as a means of legitimisation has been decidedly counterproductive. This was in part a consequence of the 'historic moment' in which he wrote; late nineteenth/early twentieth-century thinking was wedded to the notion of a scientific positivism, where the development of 'laws' of acting did not seem out of place, and in Russia the growing demands of Socialist Realism colluded in the formulation of such 'laws'. However, as Stanislavski himself insisted, his 'system' was predicated upon an organic, evolving process – its terminology attempting to express in a simple and prosaic way an approach to the practical business of acting. It is this approach, the approach of an actor, to the problems encountered when standing up in a rehearsal room and trying to make a scene work, that is as relevant now as it ever was.

That said, as a teacher I keep coming back to those key concepts that struck me with such force over a quarter of a century ago: *given circumstances*, *objectives*, *obstacles* and *actions*. I am reminded of the principle of *Ockham's razor* which favours simplicity in theoretical propositions – the best theory being that which explains the most things with the fewest assumptions. An actor can play an *objective* or an *action* – it is something he/she can 'do' which is demonstrably and instantly effective in that it clarifies a scene, it enhances clear communication of text to an audience, it mitigates against the pitfalls of *generalisation*, of playing a state, of playing the mood of the scene/play. It may be argued that the notion of a psychologically consistent *through-line-of-action* is applicable to naturalistic drama only – this may be, but it does not preclude the use of *objectives*, *obstacles* and *actions* within a scene or even in relation to a particular line no matter what the style of the play. In addition I have found the *magic if* to be an effective tool in the realisation of all kinds of text - from Brecht to Pinter.

In the fourth century BC Aristotle pointed to the priority of action or *praxis* in the construction of tragic drama, the word drama itself derives from the Greek word *dran*, which refers to 'doing' or 'a thing done'. Stanislavski's 'system', like much of Aristotle's theory, took as it's model, its object of study: life, nature and human action. I would tentatively suggest that anybody who tries to deconstruct the behavioural processes that lie behind human action is likely to stumble upon just such motivating forces, though the names they give these forces will vary. I would contend that it is for this reason that Stanislavski's 'system' remains a vital

force in actor training today. It is why it became the foundation of my own process as an actor, and why, in conjunction with the techniques of those who built on Stanislavski's approach, it forms the basis of my teaching practice.

## Section Seven: Teaching Stanislavski at Rose Bruford College (Case Study)

*This report is written by Thomasina Unsworth, lecturer on the BA degree in Acting. The work of the BA Acting students at Rose Bruford provides the fourth case study for the project and examples of work that Thomasina refers to can be found on the Stanislavski Project DVD.*

I think that it is important to make clear that the training offered at Rose Bruford College is constantly being scrutinized by the practitioners providing it. It is therefore not a fixed and rigid thing, but rather a shifting organic process. It needs to be such not only because the training must reflect the changing demands of the industry that it prepares for, but also because we view the actors as individuals with different needs and responsive to different stimuli. Stanislavski said that his own 'system'; 'is a guide. Open and read. The system is a handbook, not a philosophy.'<sup>23</sup> This 'guide' has, and continues to be, developed and changed as teachers bring their own understanding, experience and influences to bear on the work. Many of the ideas explored in the first year draw on practitioners who came after Stanislavski, notably Uta Hagan, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Declan Donnellan, Mike Alfreds and Bella Merlin. As the work continues into the second year, students focus on texts by playwrights such as Pinter, Barker and Brecht before concentrating on Shakespeare and other Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Different demands are made depending on the text, as is shown in the interview with David Zoob, and teachers formulate the means of enabling the actors to find appropriate modes of expression for these writers.

However, what informs the choices made by individual teachers is a common aim. We use current teaching practices because we want the acting students at Rose Bruford College to enter the profession with certain tools, approaches to work, and attitudes, that we think will best serve theatre, television and film in the twenty-first century.

Mike Alfreds speaks of the potential that actors have, through their work, to "shock us with truth."<sup>24</sup> Such a statement invites a much wider debate on the definition of truth than there is space for here. Meisner talked of the need for an actor 'to live truthfully under imaginary circumstances.'<sup>25</sup> Stanislavski spoke of a 'creative truth.'<sup>26</sup> It must be noted however, that no-one owns the rights to the notion of truth. I will define truth, in this context, as being something that taps into a universal source focusing on the question of what it is to be human, although again I acknowledge that notions of universality can be debated. An actor who has the capability to affect an audience as Alfreds suggests is possible, must be dynamic, imaginative, and open, engaged with life and art and must observe the world that they inhabit. They must also have an insight into the world of the play

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23 Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Stanislavski's System", in Hodge, A.ed. *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, (London: Routledge 2000) p33.

24 Mike Alfreds, *Different Every Night*. (London: Nick Hern Books) p17

25 Sanford Meisner & Dennis Longwell *On Acting*. (New York: Vintage) p15

26 Sharon Marie Carnicke *Stanislavsky in focus* (London: Routledge) p 14

and its demands. They must take a responsibility for the delivery of that truth, and have considered ideas about theatre making and their craft.

When students first arrive they are normally more concerned with the results not the process. They tend to adopt superficial modes of expression and attempt to regurgitate a clichéd version of what they view as truthful acting. Often this involves a great deal of emoting and a tendency to work with the broad brush strokes that paint the world of the soap opera. They have in fact changed little I am sure since Stanislavski's day when he urged the actors that he worked with to 'play the cause not the effect'.<sup>27</sup> In order to begin to chip away at the blocks and habits that inhibit an actor's expression we do not use any text for the majority of the first semester during acting classes. The aim is to move the actor away from notions of performance in the first weeks of their training. Indeed, during the entire first year the emphasis is always placed on process rather than performance. The presence of a piece of text initially tends to steer the student towards a more presented mode of working which is not the starting point of the training at the college. Instead the actors are asked to work from themselves, by which I mean to use their own imaginations, their own voices, their own physicality and their own emotional range. We do not necessarily ask them to use their own experiences, although these may be drawn on. This notion of self again invites wider debate, but in this context that is what it refers to.

Initial acting classes at Rose Bruford concentrate on triggering imagination whilst in a relaxed state, so actors will be asked to engage in exercises such as lying on the floor and gradually expanding their circles of awareness from listening to their own bodies, to listening to sounds within the room, to sounds outside in the corridor, to sounds in the immediate surroundings of the building all the way out to sounds they hear in space and then back through the stages to their bodies again. They will be asked to recount the first five minutes of their day in great detail paying attention to noise, smell, quality of light and texture, what they are doing and how they are feeling. They may engage in exercises that focus on different charkas of energy, or develop their senses as they work to identify each other without using their sight.<sup>28</sup> Such exercises are repeated throughout their first year in order to strengthen their powers of imagination. Their imagination is treated rather like a muscle that needs building up.

Alongside this work the notion of being, not showing, is introduced. Declan Donnellan writes that the actor 'should never try to make anything clear to the audience.'<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the training, we follow this approach. During an early class the students are divided into two groups. One group watches the other and then this is reversed. The group that is not watching is asked to leave the room and then to return one by one. They are asked to walk into the space, stop when they are in the middle, introduce themselves to the spectators by saying their name, and then leave the room again. This proves an incredibly difficult assignment despite its apparent simplicity. Actors feel uncomfortable; they skip into the room; their hands hug their pockets; they add a whistle or a jaunty

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<sup>27</sup> Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavski's System*, in Hodge, A.ed. *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (London: Routledge 2000) p26

<sup>28</sup> Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), p74

<sup>29</sup> Declan Donnellan, *The Actor and the Target*, (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002), p250

greeting, perhaps a salute or a bow. The need is always to perform in some way. By doing so they attempt to hide themselves but actually reveal much about their inner states at that point. I often write a line from a Robert Frost poem on the board, which reads, 'Something we were withholding/ Made us weak/Until we found it was ourselves.' It is the withholding of the self, as I have defined it, that the first year pays such close attention to.

In order for the actors to continue to grapple with the notion of resisting presenting in any way, we use a number of exercises which we call object exercises. They stem loosely from classes that Uta Hagan outlines in her book *Respect For Acting*.<sup>30</sup> These have developed over the years and are taught in conjunction with ideas from other practitioners such as Meisner. These exercises have previously been taught in a more rigid form with strict adherence to time keeping and without allowing fully for actors to find something unplanned in the moment and to pursue that instead of what they had prepared and rehearsed. One in the series of these exercises has been dropped altogether. It involved the actor exploring characteristics that they did not necessarily make manifest in their everyday lives. It was found that in doing so the students fell back towards a presentation of something removed from them. They began to force the characteristics rather than discover them more organically. The exercise seemed to contradict the ethos of the first year, which encourages spontaneity and responsiveness. The exercises also used to be taught in a block one after the other, now however they sit between other explorations and feed into those, and draw from them. The first, which is very simple, is useful not only because it continues to promote the idea of being rather than showing, but also because it introduces the actors to what Stanislavski terms as 'a grammar of acting.' In its most basic terms Stanislavski's 'system' can be explained as want, do, feel. The actor is asked to think of an objective. This should not be urgent, but should nonetheless be clear. They engage with three activities that are undertaken in real time in order to achieve this objective. Any feelings that result do so through the physical pursuit of the activities. The actors must consider basic questions that provide the given circumstances that house the exercise. "What time is it? Where is it?" etc.

Further object exercises include the notion of an obstacle. The next exercise is verbal. Actors work in pairs. One of the pair wants something from the other. Their partner serves as an obstacle by being unwilling to give it. The actor who is driving the exercise must employ three actions in order to gain what they want. Here we see a clear Stanislavskian principle, that these actions are psychophysical, the mind and body are not separated. The actor attaches a transitive verb to each action, for instance, "I threaten, I seduce, I implore." They undertake these actions fully, pursuing them as far as possible in order to engage with the ideas behind the exercise. The focus is clearly on what the actor is doing in order to get what he or she wants from the partner. The obstacle creates the point of tension from which the drama is created.

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30 Uta Hagan *Respect For Acting* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1973)

Over the years this exercise has changed. Now we will stop and play with the actions; we will change them depending on how they are being received. The three prepared transitive verbs might be lost entirely as we find we need to adjust the behaviour in order to be truly responsive to the other actor involved. We will play with apparently contradicting actions to explore the many routes that human beings take in order to get what they want. We may take a break to do some of Meisner's repetition exercise in order to make sure that we are really listening and responding to each other and not simply getting so carried away in exploring our actions that we fail to take our partner into account. It is important to keep the work fluid and in relation to the needs of the particular actor who is working at that moment. I have found that the practice of selecting a transitive verb to clarify an action, whether in an improvisation or for a line of text, can be useful, but depending on the actor it can also be a great hindrance. Students can get bogged down with trying to come up with the exact word that expresses what they are doing and their focus turns away from their partner and onto this task as an end in itself. Some actors find that the struggle to find an appropriate word places them in their heads. For others it provides a clear launch pad from which to work. It is therefore a useful teaching tool. This exercise explains the concept well. Finding a transitive verb is also very helpful when an actor is lost when working on a piece of text, and as a result is failing to be specific in what they are doing.

The third exercise we engage with becomes verbal if circumstances dictate it. One actor undertakes three activities in order to leave the room to go and do something specific. There is an obstacle that assumes enormous stakes. In order to leave the room they will have to leave someone asleep in the bed, who they want very much to stay with. That person can be anyone close to them at all; father, brother, mother, friend, lover. They do not want to wake their sleeping partner, so they are forced to undertake their tasks as silently as possible. The pull outside of the room must be equal to that in the room so the actor is placed in conflict and at the onset of the exercise they do not know which force will triumph. Once again the actor is being asked to use their imagination in order to experience a division between two needs. Students will experience this discord through their whole bodies as there is physical expression of the psychological discourse. If their partner wakes up they must either tell them that they are leaving, or get back into bed with them.

I mentioned earlier that these exercises are no longer stacked together but sit between others. We view it as imperative that actors listen and respond to each other. Objectives and actions are hollow concepts if they are not in relation to the stimuli that provoke them. Much of the early work concerns itself with observation of the behaviour of others and what this triggers in us, and how it changes the way in which we in turn behave. An exercise that usefully illustrates this intention is called "Two People In an Empty Space."<sup>31</sup> Two actors face each other diagonally across the room, maintaining eye contact. Their only instruction is to impose nothing but to receive every thing from the person opposite them. They can touch each other, sit, dance, do cartwheels, stay motionless, anything, except talk to each other. They can do any of the above only in relation to what

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31 Bella Merlin *Beyond Stanislavsky* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), p120



they observe in their partner and how that makes them feel. The exercise can run for as long as it needs to. Perhaps the best way of explaining it is to offer an example of a pair of students engaging with it. I will call them George and Chris. At the start of the exercise there is nothing, the silence seems palpable, the space between them tangible. As the moments pass the atmosphere becomes increasingly charged. George has started by actively scrutinising his partner, seeking to observe something in him that will galvanise him into action. This proves too exhausting to sustain and since Chris appears to be doing nothing George feels unrewarded and so eventually abandons the effort. Both start to relax, breathing deepens and gradually they begin to communicate. Chris half smiles and George raises an eyebrow, they twitch their big toes simultaneously. A sort of dance ensues, slow and tentative, with Chris behaving more assertively. Without quite registering what he is doing he leans in gently to kiss his partner on the lips and George immediately recoils but interestingly backs away only by an inch or so. He does not want to kiss but is moved by his partner's desire to do so, he feels a rush of concern for him. Suddenly embarrassed by his partner's apparent kindness, moments later Chris leaves the room. George remains leaning against the brick wall, still maintaining contact through the glass door that now separates them. He stands, seemingly prepared to wait forever until Chris breaks eye contact and his focus turns back on the room. This exercise is also used later in the semester when we turn to text. Characters face each other in the space and layers are added as bits of text are used.

In a continuation of this work a large block of classes are devoted to exercises derived from the work of Sanford Meisner. This is a relatively new introduction and illustrates how the teaching has developed and changed over the past few years. The repetition exercises are built up over the course of the weeks, progressing from the simple idea of repeating what you hear with no added comment or nuance, to repeating it from your own point of view, to setting up improvisations between two people; one engaging in a task the other entering the room. The stakes are gradually heightened as the exercises develop. As we begin to work on text the repetition exercises continue but we have the script to work off. The key points are that the actor is encouraged to work off the behaviour of their partner and not to dictate what they think should be happening and so manipulate the work; they must listen and respond, they have to use their imaginations and they are forced to stop being polite and censoring what they do. They begin to really hear what is happening in a piece of text and how their partner is delivering that text. The result is that the students become much more alive to each moment as it is unfolding. They cease to dredge up emotions or pump for a dramatic response.

These exercises link with a body of work termed Musicality which is currently used with the actor musicians and which we intend to bring onto the acting course, again showing a development in the teaching over the years. I have mentioned text quite frequently and tried to show how the exercises talked about are integrated with work on a script. Towards the end of the first semester we spend time with four line dialogues as we return to the principals of locating the circumstances, establishing objectives, playing actions etc. The work now is also informed by a receptiveness and awareness of the behaviour of the other actor.

We then apply these factors to a longer piece such as David Mamet's play *Cold* where actors are encouraged to experiment with choices.

Having introduced text into the classes, students now spend time learning how to break down the text. Working with a play such as *Port* by Simon Stephens, we discuss the super task of the writer's work,<sup>32</sup> then we title the Acts. We then divide the text into units, which are defined as the largest piece of text in which one event, pertinent to all the characters, takes place. A new unit almost always occurs with an entrance of a character into the scene. All the characters that appear in the unit should give it a possible title, which makes their character the subject. Within this there are sub-units that occur when a long unit has clear sub-divisions that still pertain to the overall event in the unit. The actions are what the character is doing in the unit. These develop as rehearsals continue. This work underpins the approach that students take on all projects in the first year and is modified depending on the text throughout the training. It allows the students a clear framework from which to approach the play; it enables them to work through manageable sections and in detail. It also provides the actors with a vocabulary that is shared by many of the practitioners that they will encounter in their training and beyond.

When working on a play, actors are also asked to write monologues for their characters, which take place up to one year before the play starts. These must not be a character biography but should recount an experience that they have imagined their character undergoing. It should be detailed and pay attention to characteristics that they feel, having read the text several times, their character possesses. They will explore the tempo- rhythm of the character. Actors will be asked to endow any objects that surround their characters with significance. Actors will be asked to re-enact a private moment experienced by their character unseen in the play but selected after close reading of the text. A lot of work is done too using Meisner's exercises based on free association.<sup>33</sup> In rehearsal a process of active analysis<sup>34</sup> is employed. I have listed some of the exercises here in order to reflect the strong influence Stanislavski has on the core of the work. It is by no means exhaustive and different teachers will emphasise different elements.

A recent introduction to the first year curriculum that we made three years ago is a weekly class on dramaturgy revolving around a text such as Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. This work occurs as a matter of course in the second year but it was felt that the students should take into consideration, earlier in their training, an understanding of the way a play is structured and to engage with the responsibility an actor has to serve this structure. This work runs along side the psychological explorations in other acting classes and is an example of how the training is developing. During this class Stanislavskian principles are not the focus of the teaching.

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<sup>32</sup> Jean Benedetti *An Actor's Work* (London: Routledge, 2008), p307.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Silverberg *The Sanford Meisner Approach. Work Book Four* (New York: Smith and Kraus, 2000) p85.

<sup>34</sup> Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Stanislavski's System", in Hodge Alison .Ed. *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (London: Routledge, 2000) p27.

As students move into the second year they are exposed to a variety of playwrights. As they explore non-naturalistic texts they may not require a character biography, and the through line of action may well be fragmented. However students now have tools that they can draw on. They can still, for example, identify an objective, play an action, make use of the “magic if”,<sup>35</sup> and identify the key events. The core teaching of the first year provides a framework for the actor from which to explore in different ways. The actors should now be working with active imaginations, in response to each other and in relation to the demands of the play. The confidence they need to do so should have been established through the ideas they engaged with earlier in their training. Having moved through work that drew on their own resources to texts that demand an actor responds to the political and social content of the play and acknowledges the relationship with the audience, they are then prepared to enter the third year. Here they become accustomed to public performance and are introduced to television, film and radio acting.

I hope that through the brief outline that I have given of current teaching practices, that it will be clear why it is still considered relevant to include Stanislavski methodology at the heart of the training at Rose Bruford. Returning to the aims of the course, we encourage students to be responsive, dynamic, flexible and instinctive. We also ask that our students are aware of the different demands of the texts and view themselves as potential theatre makers of the future. The exercises and ideas explored during the three years work to release and promote these qualities in the actor.

Much of what we see in film, television and theatre in the twenty first century requires the actor to take a psychophysical approach. Even within texts that might call for other modes of expression there are elements of the methodology that can be of use. Until that is no longer a primary demand of the industry we prepare for, it seems foolish to ignore the enormous influence that Stanislavski's system has on the way that actors work in this country.

Yet when a methodology becomes fixed there is a danger that the work will become stagnant and reductive. I have referred to the changes that have occurred to the training at Rose Bruford College over recent years and such training must continue to develop in response to the needs of the student and the demands of the profession. Perhaps it would be appropriate to close with Stanislavski's own words, which remind us not to get too locked into one way of working at the exclusion of all others: ‘Human life is so subtle, so complex, so multifaceted, that it needs an incomparably large number of new, still undiscovered ‘isms’ to express it fully.’<sup>36</sup> The key words being ‘still undiscovered.’

To complete this case study of the BA Acting programme at Rose Bruford College and in order to elicit from students some thoughts about the transition from 16+ to university based work on acting practice I asked the cohort of students who were completing their first year to reflect upon their experience.

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Benedetti *An Actors work* (London: Routledge, 2008), p37.

<sup>36</sup> Sharon Marie Carnicke, “Stanislavski's System”, in Hodge Alison .Ed *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. (London:Routledge, 2000), p 32

These are some of the comments they made:

*Having come straight from a 6<sup>th</sup> form education's perspective on acting, I effectively had no real experience of naturalistic acting so I have encountered a completely new, and more rewarding method of acting. I believe I know myself much better than I did at the start of the year, physically, mentally and to a degree spiritually.*

*I have learnt that acting is a serious business and I learnt that very quickly.*

*I was very surprised that I now have a great love for picking text apart and fully investigating every word, structure, and piece of punctuation. Detail truly is the best starting point.*

*A very specific thing I learnt in the first year was about the whole 'demonstrating' thing. Playing a whole scene on an idea of a character rather than being in the present – that was very important and something I had no idea about. Also the 'stakes' were something that started to kick in and that really helped me to overcome the desire to show what I was doing in my work and instead focus on the objective at hand.*

*The cliché is true – you learn more from failure than from getting things right – for example the object exercises that didn't go so well were the ones I learnt from the most.*

*I've learnt how much text and character are connected. Now that may seem the most obvious thing in the world but it really isn't. ....Only that character would say that exact line. So the character emerges from the text and not the other way round. What really amazed me was the effect it had on my body language. I don't really have to invent anything like I did a lot at the beginning of the year.*

*Actually what we were taught was how to feel our way through a scene moment by moment and that the sound of the lines would take care of themselves. It wasn't about tricking the audience, but trying to experience something and trusting that that would come through in our work.*

## Section Eight: Teaching Stanislavski at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Case Study)

*In this fifth case study, Jane Boston, Head of Research at RADA examines the influence of Stanislavski on the teaching there. Evidence is provided from interviews with teachers Dee Cannon, Alex Clifton, Chris Heimann and Brigid Panet and a postgraduate student. A film by Peter Oyston, who directed at RADA for many years, in which a working introduction to some of the basic tenets of early Stanislavski are demonstrated, has also provided material.<sup>37</sup>*

*The current work of Dee Cannon, senior acting tutor at RADA for over fifteen years, was chosen as the particular example of work with students and examples of that work can be found on the Stanislavski Project DVD.*

The story of Stanislavski's emergence as the main theoretical underpinning for the actor training at RADA is one intimately connected to the history of the twentieth century. The patterns of migration which took many artists from Europe to the United States and back again via the UK, on both sides of the two World Wars, played a huge part in both the spread of his 'system' and in the range of interpretations of it that took root. To understand how Stanislavski's ideas eventually arrived at RADA it is important to look at some of the key figures who were responsible for bringing a training 'system' to students far removed from those in Russia for whom it was initially created.

Dee Cannon, one of three acting teachers currently at RADA, traces her own connection to the teachings of Stanislavski directly back to her mother, Doreen Cannon (1930-1995). Doreen inherited much of her knowledge from studying with Uta Hagen and Herbert Berghof. They in turn were part of a generation who had been in contact with teachers who worked with Stanislavski and, in the case of another teacher in this community called Stella Adler, actually had direct contact with Stanislavski himself. Doreen Cannon was Head of Acting at RADA for many years and her daughter Dee speaks of herself as being a direct descendent of a tradition that is both familial in nature but also international in its reach.

Dee says that to the best of her knowledge it wasn't until Drama Centre was formed in 1963 that the influence of Stanislavski really began to take hold. I asked Dee to elaborate on the actor training methods prior to that date that tutors at Drama Centre took issue with. She answered that the teaching had been based principally on rehearsal and the performance results sometimes lacked veracity and impact.

Dee explained that whilst the writing in the British dramatic canon, including Bennett, Stoppard, Wilde, Shaw and so on, isn't inherently superficial, it could easily be interpreted as being less than emotional and, at its worst, as psychologically shallow. Although a lot of the writing could be regarded as being clever and witty, in which any 'good' actor might discover the depth by instinct,

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Oyston *How to Use the Stanislavski System* (Victoria: Full Moon Films 2003).

many rehearsal processes had focused on textual analysis and the physical externals and, as such, had been more related to a literary approach than to examining the psychological depth of character. In these rehearsals, the world of the character and their emotional life could easily be regarded as providing a less significant motor and therefore it remained possible for stage life to be lived from the 'neck' up. A three dimensional approach to character, based upon Stanislavski, has enabled Dee, on the other hand, to best train students to counter this as well as to use the text effectively as part of the process.

Acting tutor Brigid Panet has an angle on the teachings of Stanislavski that takes a different stance to the one adopted by Dee. She refers to the permission to experiment and to fail granted in Stanislavski's approach that can be regarded, perhaps, as less of a 'system' than a philosophy.

Her background was initially as a movement teacher, after having trained at Central School of Speech and Drama from 1954-1957 as an actor, followed by professional work in the theatre for over fourteen years. This then led to her directing students at Rose Bruford College where she was also able to learn more about Laban's ideas from Maxwell Shaw. Shaw had originally worked with Joan Littlewood under whose tutelage he learnt from Jean Newlove who had, in turn, studied under Laban.

Brigid Panet's approach, unusual in the British system, was intensely physical and she brought this perspective with her when she was invited to RADA by Principal Oliver Neville to do work on Jacobean drama in the mid eighties. In answer to a question about the place of Stanislavski in her teaching, she replied that she felt her approach was much more simple than his. As opposed to his thirteen basic questions, she said she has just three: simplicity, the taking away of any excuse and the consistent provision of the experience of success. This simplicity, she feels, marks a real difference in her approach that can be very useful for feeding the joy back into the work whenever it gets too dense or systematic. Her belief in the necessity of joyful work is also part of her wider view that teaching should not be invasive. Brigid's teaching also calls for specificity. In her approach, nothing can be generalized. Initially all that is required is the slowing and quietening down of the actor to enable work to begin. Accordingly prepared, she feels they have no need to impose an acting voice and can utilise, instead, a constant stream of bright images from their switched on imaginations. Brigid explicitly draws upon Stanislavski in this way and has built this sensibility into her training vocabulary. She cites as a critical influence the text *Stanislavski in Rehearsal: The Final Years* by V Toporkov.<sup>38</sup>

Toporkov was an actor who went to work with Stanislavski after having been hugely struck by his direction on Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. In the last ten years of Stanislavski's life, between 1928 and 1938, Toporkov wrote down these later rehearsal processes and the resulting book about this period provides all the insightful quotes utilised by Brigid as the basis for her teaching.

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38 Vasili Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, (London:Methuen 2001)

Drawing primarily on his method of physical actions, Stanislavski had by this time, jettisoned emotional memory and the long process of analyzing the text for months on end and had come out with a method of physical action in which action and emotion fused simultaneously. Brigid connects William James's work and the work of Rudolf Laban to Stanislavski to provide a psychophysical approach to performance but not a set of rules.<sup>39</sup> The definition of acting that emerges from this fusion is one of being able to take one's "entire attention from the truth of daily life to the truth of imagination". Brigid believes that the well-trained actor should be able to do this at will, immediately, consistently and deeply.

Acting tutor Alex Clifton first learnt about the work of Stanislavski as a director working with Phyllida Lloyd and these ideas were later linked by Jennie Buckman to the tradition of actor training at RADA. Jennie Buckman, a senior acting tutor, had also studied with Doreen Canon before teaching at RADA. Jennie had discussed with Alex the core of the actor- training curriculum at RADA, the body of exercises that take the students through to playing verbal actions, with a consciousness of inner and outer obstacles. Although these might be taken at a different pace and rhythm, according to the teacher involved, they were substantially the same exercises as those passed down by Doreen Cannon.

Chris Heimann, RADA's current improvisation tutor, comparing the different interpretations of Stanislavski's work in Russia and in the UK, said that he thought the focus in Russia was more on the physical behaviour of the character within the given circumstances. From experiences in improvisation, the actor would then be able to arrive at reasons for the language to be spoken, whereas in the UK, the actor would be invited to explore the language of the text at the outset, without as much focus on the body in action.

Interestingly, with each teacher there was no clear evidence offered that any of their students were invited to consider that they had been working with Stanislavski's ideas. Caroline Jay Ranger, the student, said his theories were not explicitly mentioned at all during her experience of the work whilst in Dee's rehearsal. This is very likely to be representative of an approach found in conservatoire training. The methods and processes utilised are viewed as being very much the result of the tutor's own experience in the field – ideas they have absorbed in a professional context rather than ideas they have adopted as a theoretical stance.

The narrative about the relationship of Stanislavski to the prevailing pedagogy at RADA continues with a look back to the formation of Drama Centre in 1962-3, in which a 'new awareness of movement was harnessed to the work of Stanislavski, providing a more revolutionary European focus to British theatre ' under the leadership of Yat Malmgren and John Blatchley.

*'A casual encounter on a bank holiday evening led to Yat Malmgren being introduced to Harold Lang, a maverick advocate of the work of Stanislavski. Lang coerced almost everyone he knew into attending Malmgren's movement classes, including Bill Gaskill...*

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<sup>39</sup> William James 1842-1910. Rudolf Laban 1879-1958. See: *The Writings of William James* ed. J. McDermott (USA: Phoenix 1980) & Karen Bradley, *Rudolf Laban*, (London: Routledge.2009)

*In 1960, Lang's influence once again proved decisive. Invited to join the staff of the Central School of Speech and Drama by John Blatchley, Lang made his acceptance of the offer dependent on the appointment of Malmgren as director of movement. Here at last the doors to European theatre were opened. Fascinated by rumours reaching them from students on the acting course, other students expressed dissatisfaction at their own syllabuses. The management lost its head, and sacked Malmgren on the trumped-up charge of creating "neck tensions".*

*Within days seven other teachers, including Lang and Blatchley, had left, to be followed by three quarters of the students. A call to Olivier to save the day was firmly, if politely, rejected, and Drama Centre London was born."<sup>40</sup>*

Doreen Cannon was brought in at the outset to become Drama Centre's new Head of Acting in order to complement the textual work of Blatchley and the new movement work of Malmgren.

Originally from NY, Doreen had studied there for ten years as an actress under Uta Hagen (1919-2004) and Herbert Berghof. (Uta Hagen, interestingly, had previously spent a brief spell training at RADA in 1936.) In New York, Cannon also benefited from a dynamic training culture that included Stella Adler (1901-1992), Meisner (1905-1997) and Strasberg (1901-1982), in which it was a well-documented fact within their Group Theatre history that Adler went to Paris and later Moscow in order to seek out the work of Stanislavski.

In the Spring and Fall of 1923, Stanislavski toured with the Moscow Art Theatre to the USA and it was at this time that Adler saw his performances. This was to have a lasting impact on her career, and also on the 20th century American theatre. She joined the American Laboratory Theatre School in 1925, and was introduced to Stanislavski's theories by the Russian actor-teachers and former members of the Moscow Art Theatre, Richard Boleslavski and Maria Ouspenskaya. In 1931 Adler joined the Group Theatre, founded by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, who were all leading interpreters of the method acting technique based on the work and writings of Stanislavski.

Doreen eventually arrived in England in 1958, for personal reasons, and came to live in London at the same time as Uta Hagen was in the UK performing in the West End production of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Uta began to provide Saturday workshops for the English and American actors in the company and for outside professional actors. When she eventually went back to the States, Doreen carried on her classes. This prompted Yat Malmgren and Christopher Fettes to notice her work and, as we have seen, she was subsequently invited to be the first Head of Acting at Drama Centre.

Doreen eventually left Drama Centre after twenty years when she was invited to be Head of Acting at RADA under principal Oliver Neville. Her appointment was, in part, prompted by director Bill Gaskill who was frustrated that RADA was "stuck in the dark ages" and only teaching acting through rehearsal, with a facility for language and little else. This was in direct contrast to Drama Centre where

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40 Christopher Fettes, *Guardian Obituary* Thursday June 13, 2002



actors such as Frances de la Tour, Pierce Brosnan and Colin Firth were emerging, stamped with the distinctive breadth and depth of Doreen's approach. Whilst it was obvious that RADA was also producing good actors, they were regarded as being more associated with the classical repertoire, with its bias towards the language of a character and less towards their psychology.

Dee Cannon, in turn, learnt everything by watching her mother in rehearsal, finding great fascination in the process and the atmosphere, and absorbing everything without necessarily realising it. By the age of fifteen she had decided she wanted to be an actress and started to take her mother's Saturday classes and by so doing put herself in a professional workshop with actors prior to her own actor training experience.

Dee's development of her system of actor training was then much enhanced by her move over to the Arts Educational School in West London where she studied with John Blatchley. Many teachers from Drama Centre had by this time moved to Arts and so Dee was able to complete aspects of her own training as an actor whilst also continuing to study with Doreen. She then worked on and off as an actor whilst running theatre workshops for children, as well as other taking directing and teaching jobs until in 1993 the new Principal at RADA, Nick Barter, invited her to become an acting tutor alongside Doreen Cannon and Jennie Buckman.

Dee has spoken about her approach to teaching and how important it has been to her that her students are able to both demonstrate a curiosity about learning and an ability to reveal their talent. Talent is something Dee defines as the ability to breathe life into a character and to transform, adding, that it can be very easy to recite but very hard to make acting truthful because both the language and the inner life needs to be reflected. Dee feels that the RADA approach succeeds because the wide range of movement and vocal opportunities, coupled with the acting classes, make for a really good synergy.

She compares this to training in the USA where students she says are only taught about the emotions to the detriment of their being heard or being able to move. This approach she regards as indulgent and of no interest to an audience. In her view, the skill is to be able to analyse the text in order to create a fully rounded character, which is then able to inhabit the world required at a level of heightened reality appropriate for the theatre context.

The video clip that accompanies this report shows part of an exercise experienced by trainee actors towards the end of the second term, after approximately fifteen weeks of exposure to the training principles. Their previous work had involved, amongst other things, the study of the student's own life recreations, in order to test the emotional triggers in their worlds, an awareness of the obstacles they faced in getting their needs met and in the use of animals to allow them to stretch into playing emotions outside their immediate range. This latter approach was side-coached by Dee to ensure that the use of animals kept the individuals away from their 'known' centres and allowed them to move beyond normalisation towards something exciting and visceral.

The exercise shown on the *Stanislavski Project* DVD reflects a common pitfall that Dee often sees student actors fall into when they are required to play characters in a very impoverished world who assume that whatever they set up has only to reflect this impoverishment. Dee lets the students play this out on the so they can experience the fact that four weeks into the work they have still not developed and have only clutched onto what the text has literally said instead of being challenged to think outside the box. Here, she tries to get them to use their imaginations – for her the crux of Stanislavski's work – since the imagination can only be used effectively if it comes out of the world of the play and has been underpinned by solid preparatory research.

The postgraduate student said that this detailed building of a reality really worked because it provided specificity for her life as an actor in a role and at all times provided the bedrock of her reality. Dee later enlarged upon this idea, saying how essential it was to be clear about the objects on stage which always involved reassuring the actor by giving them something believable to do. I asked about the meaning of the word "object" and Dee replied that items used were called "objects" as opposed to "properties" because a "prop" means nothing to the actor who is concerned with creating a credible reality on stage. By the same token Dee doesn't call the clothing used costumes but rather garments or clothes as they might be called in everyday life.

In Dee's acting room there are many storage lockers in which she keeps the materials out of which the students can create real rooms and real environments. The lockers are literally crammed with living room stuff, kitchen utensils, office bits, pieces of furniture and so on which provide the objects that will enable the actors to feel secure. Dee believes that if the actor doesn't feel secure it will always show.

Dee asks that students bring in their own personal stuff for the first term in order to set up their first object exercise. In the second term, when they are playing characters from dramatic texts they are permitted to use these materials. This approach relates to Stanislavski's system of rehearsal in which the actor needed to 'know their characters' biographies so they could place their choices in the right context'... and ...'Visitors were permitted only when the actors felt secure, otherwise, extreme privacy was maintained.'<sup>41</sup>

In the first term Dee requires that the students work from their 'own truth', even though it is heightened and the possession of an objective puts them in a realm beyond naturalism. Here, the purpose is not to wait passively for something to happen but to be actively involved in what is happening moment by moment. Dee recounts that this work is helpful to the actor because they want to be stretched to experience the three dimensionality of character moment to moment and they know that her process offers them no short cuts.

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41 Samuel L. Leiter, *The Great Stage Directors*. (London: Infobase Holdings Company, 1994) p276

The detail can be seen in actors such as Michael Sheen and Michael McFadyen, both trained by Doreen Cannon, who use this approach and are successful actors. Dee expresses her frustration with actors when what she calls “the work” doesn’t seem to be used and they appear to be distracted by directorial demands and forget the approach they could apply to the process. She teaches them, she says, above all, to be independent actors. Particularly in the light of the working reality that directors expect the character work to be done outside the rehearsal process where it can be, therefore, easy to cut corners. She points out Edward Bennett who in his recent Hamlet provides the perfect example of someone who has worked out the actions within his text, figured it out intellectually and physically and absolutely nailed the character as a result.

In conclusion the current teaching at RADA has very clear routes back to earlier teaching of the Stanislavski ‘system’ and can lay claim to a rich connection with both the philosophical imperatives for its use as a teaching tool and for its links with other major theories such as Freudian psychoanalysis and Laban’s ‘Effort actions’.

In short, the mind, the emotions and the interior are significantly valued in the teaching and, alongside an understanding of the expressive body and the verbal language of the dramatic repertoire, they together make a rich foundational synergy for the training actor. As to whether the work closely follows any of the route maps laid down by Stanislavski, we can see that at different times even Stanislavski ditched his own work in favour of the on-going necessity of letting new processes evolve.

The example he offers by so doing provides a fine case in point when considering the requirements of the assessment needs of pre-degree familiarity with Stanislavski. Since Stanislavski himself moved on with his thinking then so must we and the more we allow space for exploration in that pre-degree environment then the closer we are to the kind of thinking that Stanislavski actually advocated.

## Section Nine: Adventures beyond Stanislavski (Case Study)

*In this section Colin Ellwood, Programme Director for the BA Directing programme, discusses the workshops that he and five theatre practitioners conducted with a group of students at the College. The central aim of the work was to consider Stanislavski based methodology alongside other actor training approaches.*

*When I'm lost in darkness I'll shut my eyes and feel my way  
forward, grope like an animal, not be guided by some distant light'<sup>42</sup>*

The aim of this section of the research project is to investigate approaches to actor training and performance preparation that do not fall directly within the framework developed by Stanislavski but might be complementary to Stanislavski-related work in preparing actors for the expanded performance landscape of the early twenty-first century.

The work also investigates whether it might be possible for teachers to be inventive in developing techniques beyond already established non-Stanislavski approaches such as Meyerhold's Biomechanics, Michael Chekhov's system or Brecht's externalised political and emblematic approach. This work is in response to a concern that over-reliance on any single 'totalising' externally validated system can limit the development of the actor in his/her more intuitive dimensions – particularly young students entering a new training/educational environment.

It is worth acknowledging that it is quite possible to see all the work recounted here 'in relation' to either Stanislavski, or his 'successors'/rivals, or both, and some attempt will be made here to point out these relationships where it seems relevant. In terms of Stanislavski himself, his work has in its fullest incarnation proved so influential, so rich in offering an easily accessible and comprehensive framework for encouraging creativity and communicating human experience that it is almost impossible to work in any way that is not in some sense 'accommodated' within his framework.

For the sake of this exercise, a tripartite frame was posited for categorising exercises and approaches:

1. 'Outside Stanislavski.'
2. 'Broad Stanislavski' such as would be engaged with in the best actor-preparation where Stanislavski would be seen as offering a framework rather than a rule.
3. 'Narrow Stanislavski', where Stanislavski's influence is reduced to a series of simple rules and concepts, namely 'Objectives', 'Actions', 'Given Circumstances'; actor focus on individual character; more or less 'behaviourist' engagement

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42 Willy in *The Sea* by Edward Bond. (London: Methuen, 1978) Scene 6. p147

of actor and a physicality restricted to a repertoire of more or less 'naturalistic' (i.e. real social world) gestures and movements. This 'exam passing' Stanislavski does not take account of the fundamental creative and intuitive potential of the performer or of the to a large extent unconscious nature of performance preparation.

Most good work, such as that of the BA Acting Programme at Rose Bruford, takes place in the second category, although it is perhaps very difficult in a learning environment not to suffer to some degree from the constrictions of the third – in the perceptions of the trainee if not the 'default' practice of the trainer.

The project involved four practitioners each leading a single day-long workshop with a group of approximately twelve Rose Bruford students drawn from a fairly balanced mix of all three years of the BA Acting, Actor Musician and Directing courses, and of the one-year MA course. This was followed by a fifth 'summative' workshop led by Colin Ellwood further exploring the effect/influence of the earlier workshops, and then by a two hour 'plenary' session with participants. Colin Ellwood was present at all sessions. The participating student group remained constant throughout.

All practitioners were pursuing their own strands of work/research specializations. Laurie Slade and Steve Duncan, although not actor-training or professional theatre specialists (the former a psychotherapist although with a long involvement in the theatre as sometime stage manager and playwright, the latter a poet and sculptor) had both explored approaches to actor-training in previous workshops with Colin Ellwood. Marcin Rudy and Matthieu Bellon had worked together developing performance approaches with the *Song of the Goat* company and Chris Johnston has worked extensively with a 'theatre games' approach to performance.

Although all these strands were ongoing, the (partial) innovation here was that they were being applied here to drama training in the context of a Stanislavski-related project – and in relation to a core task that Stanislavski was very familiar with: the performance realisation of a Chekhov text. All work was in relation to Act 3 of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. It was felt that while it might well be possible to demonstrate the effectiveness of non-Stanislavski approaches in work in, say, devising, the 'acid test' would be in relation to the kind of work and engagement that Stanislavski was in fact aiming for – namely 'situational' text, and specifically Chekhov.

This particular Act was chosen because it was felt to offer unusual scope for work 'beyond' Naturalism, although again this was felt to be an intensification of characteristics latent throughout all Chekhov's later work, rather than something unique. The moment in which, during the Act, the drunken doctor smashes the clock (time, order, the logical division into segments, the scientific, objective mode – all obliterated by this act?) became a kind of emblem of the project's aims.

A framework within which to locate exercises and their outcomes was by categories 'Message', 'Mode' and 'Method'. The following outlines each of these categories and the posited relationship of 'Narrow Stanislavski' in them.

**Message:** The 'truth'/information being communicated. In Stanislavski this would be the character's 'real world' 'affective consciousness' in relation to needs, wants, objectives etc. In Brecht, to take an obviously contrasting example, the material prioritised (i.e. the 'message') would be the characters' social relations. Would the work here yield the possibility of another focus/information *location* or *kind* in Chekhov's text?

**Mode:** How, by the actor, the 'message' is communicated. In (Narrow?) Stanislavski the mode would be of more or less 'everyday', 'non-theatrical' behaviour (Naturalism).

**Method:** The process gone through by the performer to locate the material of the message and to develop and perfect the mode of communication. In Stanislavski, this would be a process of imagining and engaging with a reduced version of the real circumstances and aims/objectives of the character and them playing these 'as if' for real.

In relation to these categories, four 'touchstone' orienting and evaluating exercises were initially developed as ways of measuring the influence of practitioner work in slightly different 'Chekhov' contexts and in relation to potential outcomes for different areas of twenty-first century performance practice. These exercises were run at the end of the first workshop and referred to and explored as appropriate throughout the project. Each involved small groups of students working independently on small extracts from the Chekhov. They were (in a rising level of 'boldness' and progressive move away from "Narrow Stanislavski"):

**Exercise 1:** Performance/exploration of excerpt within and by a 'Narrow Stanislavski' Mode, Message and Methodology, i.e. identifying 'events' 'beats'/units, character objectives and tactics and given circumstances (but only the main situational or obvious 'physical' and character related given circumstances). These then used as the basis for an improvising through the situation within the 'behaviour' parameters of naturalism (Mode) to achieve communication of the characters' 'inner world' (Message). Although 'Narrow Stanislavski', this was intended as an enlightened and basically healthy version of this, with the model as a framework rather than a constrictor, allowing a strong element of impulse and creativity from the actor. In this exercise the performer would not directly engage with the work of the practitioner, and the exercise was intended to test whether some of this work might 'bleed through' into this 'conventional' scenario.

**Exercise 2:** As above regarding 'message', but with more discretion of the performer as to 'mode' and 'method' – i.e. the performer could be much freer and theatrical in behaviour repertoire/physical text, and in how to prepare for this. It was hoped here that practitioner work would be more consciously engaged with.

**Exercise 3:** Working 'within' Chekhov's text, but free as to mode, method and message. In other words, free to – as nascent interpretative artists – find something to respond to and communicate to an audience in the text other than or in addition to the linear goal-oriented 'affective consciousness' of the individual

character. Here it was hoped the practitioner work might help to unlock and allow the communication of dimensions of Chekhov's text untapped by conventional Stanislavski approaches. This was the most difficult of the exercises as it turned out, as it very much set the students adrift without much guidance. The final exercise of the entire project was in fact a version of this.

**Exercise 4:** Freedom to re-conceive method, mode and message in what was billed as a 'dialoguing' or 'jamming' with the Chekhov rather than a straight-forward interpretation or enactment of it. Wooster Group and Anne Bogart were cited as potential references for this. Here clearly it was hoped the practitioner work would empower the student to engage with Chekhov *as a partner*, bringing new material generated through the practitioner work to 'set against' Chekhov's text. This was in effect found to be initially more viable than Ex 3 especially in workshops 1 and 2, because these generated work by the student independent of the text, as part of the workshop format.

A fifth exercise – where students used the Chekhov purely as a stimulus for their own devising work was implicit within the practitioner work and often used as a technique towards engagement with the other four exercises.

A key concern throughout (crystallising in the final workshop) was how the techniques, discoveries and sensitivities born of the workshops could be brought to bear specifically on text in the rehearsal room and classroom, how they could provide an approach without solidifying into a reified methodology, or indeed whether such a concern or endeavour was necessary - the work done simply rather serving as a sensitisation, a priming, a background context for engaging with the text, and to be allowed to filter through as it would, depending on the constitution, inclination and sensitivity of the student. Throughout the project, suggestions towards a specific series of detailed methodological exercises/techniques were evolved as an opportunity for further investigation and research beyond the project.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the exercises and indeed the workshops was drawn from practitioner and participant feedback and observations, also through the selective filming of extracts. The issue of evaluation raises something very much at the core of the enterprise: What were we expecting? What kind of specific positive outcomes were the workshops designed to elicit? A formulation of these grew out of a sense amongst participating students and practitioners of the possible limitations and restrictions of what was understood to be Stanislavski (especially 'Narrow' Stanislavski) related work.

When asked about their experience of whatever they regarded as 'Stanislavski' in their training (for example analysing the text for units and actions) participating students, while recognising the value of the approach in providing guidance and providing tools that 'got you started', also spoke of it being 'heady' or 'head cluttering' and sometimes resulting in the 'losing of impulses and organic sense of the text', of it being 'confidence sapping' and of losing a 'sense of play' and of it disadvantaging 'people who worked differently'. All this was in relation to text-based work. (It was acknowledged however that any technique would be initially inhibitory before sufficient facility was acquired to be able to use it as a creative

tool.) There was little sense from the students of their being prepared for a broader 21st Century performance spectrum – involving the non-situational, non-naturalistic, and even ‘post-dramatic’ – in relation to which ‘Stanislavski’ work might throw up even more problems and constrictions. An argument put by several of the practitioners here was that it is the role of drama schools to prepare students for this broad spectrum where possible.

It was also noted by practitioners that students involved here were in the main products of a UK school system that tends to prioritise clear targets and methodologies, order rather than intuition, as suggested by several recent education reports. That such a background should still lead to finding Stanislavski work ‘over-defined’ and ‘inflexible’ is interesting, but the fact of this background reinforces practitioner and Rose Bruford teaching staff ‘anecdotal’ sense that the students often have a tendency to look for externally validated and simply defined solutions, rather than being willing to explore, live with uncertainty and trust their intuitions. The work of this project then was intended to counteract these perceived negative influences of ‘Narrow Stanislavski’ (while not discounting the positive) and of the prevailing primary and secondary education context.

Bearing all this in mind, a range of questions were formulated early on in the process that give a good sense specifically of what was hoped to be achieved. These were emailed to participants to serve as a rough framework/guide for evaluation:

Sent to participants:

1. The project looks at approaches to actor training that are alternatives/complementary to a ‘Stanislavski approach’. We have defined the key elements of this approach as being for example: clear simple logical character objectives; main given circumstances; individual character focus; the division of the text into units; more-or-less ‘naturalistic’ action and behaviour. Please think about your own experience/impression of the Stanislavski element of your training. What is your sense of what this is? How useful do you find it? What does it provide you with and is there anything you feel you need as a training theatre practitioner that it does not provide you with or even restricts you in?

2. In what way, if any, does the work explored in this project add to and/or offer an alternative to a ‘Stanislavski’ approach, both in general terms (perhaps in helping you to grow into a ‘richer’ and more released/accomplished/sensitive/expressive artist) and specifically in relation to the task of engaging with and expressing for an audience the work of Chekhov?

Below are some ways in which it is intended this work might be useful to you. Please think about whether you agree with any of them, also if there are any other ways this work might be helpful, and of course about any limitations or drawbacks it might have:

- They help me find a more intense engagement with play/text/scene.



- They help me achieve useful and productive non-logical, non-intellectual, non-obvious responses to play/text/scene (e.g. through 'smell' and 'dream' connections and recognitions).
- They help me access my own personal, 'biographical' associations and experiences and to accept the value, power and relevance of these.
- They give me confidence to trust my instincts and intuitions and be able to communicate them.
- They help me work intuitively and sensitively with others in the group and to respect and respond to their insights and intuitions.
- Through offering a more intense experience they encourage me to find more theatrical and physically more expressive ways of performing than are available within 'Stanislavskian naturalism.'
- They help me stop my engagement with the material being 'mechanical', 'by numbers'.
- They help me to more of a sense of ownership of my work.
- While recognising the value of the craft of acting, they encouraged me to have a sense of myself as an artist.
- They helped me think of myself and my work in relation to the play as a whole and the acting ensemble, not just in terms of my character.

These questions of course set the bar almost absurdly high, especially for mainly undergraduate students. They also beg many questions and are clearly far too tendentious for any market research survey. However they give a sense of the direction of travel. A further set of questions asked if the work here, if useful potentially, needed more specific techniques and methodologies of use and, if so, whether the student had ideas of what these might be or how to develop them, although this perhaps might be the next stage of research.

Finally, four key framing questions served as an orientation throughout:

1. Does the study and practice of Stanislavski's ideas provide a relevant performer training methodology for the 21st Century? (This will be a focus throughout in relation to contemporary performance practice and the key exercises formulated above.)
2. To what extent might focusing on these ideas have a negative effect upon actor training in the UK? (See above.)
3. What approaches have been/might be developed "beyond Stanislavski" which might be relevant, useful and/or vital to future actor training in the UK?

4. How do these approaches move into areas of actor training and performance untouched by Stanislavski methodology?

Detailed descriptions of the five workshops are given in Appendix 3.

The responses of the student participants at the end of each workshop and in the two hour plenary and in email responses was universally and almost overwhelmingly positive, despite – or perhaps because of – the remoteness of some of the techniques explored to the core training they were used to. As impressive was the release of energy the workshops brought about in the students – there was a real enthusiasm for these new things, new perspectives to explore, and a sense that the performance and training landscape was much broader, and involved them and their creative responses in a much richer and deeper way than they had perhaps assumed.

The energy generated seemed to be a sign that each student made their own sense of what was offered, drew from it what they found or needed at that particular moment of their development and received impressions they might unlock only over time and that it was their responsibility and opportunity to make sense of, not that of some remote higher authority. This seems an excellent model of development and discovery for the artist in any medium.

Beyond this, there seemed to be a great deal of common ground – in relation to the questions posed above. Students did clearly discover a more intense engagement with Chekhov's text than they had before, and in terms of what would be readily available in 'Narrow Stanislavski', in terms of its sensual existence through smell, for example; its playful comedy and fairy tale strangeness through the 'doll impro' workshop; its imaginative intensity through the text's relation to dream; and also in terms of its formal expressive qualities and structure through the work on musicality.

Clearly also – again from observation and student comment – there was a re-prioritising of instinct and intuition over logic and deliberation in the way the students approached, responded to and enacted the material. A sense of self-trust – trust of emotions, intuitions and reflex actions – was strengthened, born no doubt to some extent simply out of the confidence engendered through successfully exploring new territories, but also through the use of the various techniques that encouraged – even rendered necessary – this self trust. This seemed to extend into both self-trust of the personal associations each student could bring to bear to the work (the smell associations, the dream associations, the associations of childhood and play from the 'doll work'), and also 'outwards' to the trust of this material and impulses from others in the group, and the ability beyond even this to cherish and work sensitively with these, and in so doing achieve a balance between individual and group 'imaginative identity'. To put it at its strongest; these were at times not simply actors playing characters, but artists engaging in an ensemble with imaginative material offered by Chekhov and responding and working with this and also their own imaginative material to move towards something peculiarly and intensely of the moment. Or at least they seemed – by their own accounts and in view of their work through the project – *to be moving towards this*.

In a sense, the 'paradigm' within which they viewed themselves might be said to be shifting, away from (to again use an extreme formulation) 'jobbing actor' to 'artist'. And the context in which they were developing, also shifting from *training establishment* for an 'industry' to 'art school' for an *art form* - performance. Of course any conservatoire performance training must somehow encompass both ends of this 'spectrum', but given the issues raised and student concerns expressed about a purely 'Narrow Stanislavski' (and even 'Broader Stanislavski') approach in the context of the current UK secondary education system and in view also of the natural 'entrenching' or 'retracting' tendency of any young student thrown into the intensity of a new and challenging education environment, such a shift, such a rebalancing of priorities in student perceptions, surely has a case to be made for it.

The other paradigm invoked, and perhaps even lying behind that of the artist, was of course that of the playful child

Reviewing briefly the outcomes of the four/five Exercises posited as 'touchstones' and the threads of 'message', 'mode' and 'method' running through them:

**Message:** at various points in the work done students were communicating/expressing something more or other than 'affective consciousness' of an individual character at an 'emotionally realistic' level – as in '(Narrow) Stanislavski'. Sometimes this was through a more intense 'dream-like' engagement with a character's emotions, sometimes through a distilling of a character's responses, and sometimes through a distancing from and 'witty interpreting' of the character (as for example in the portrayal of Natasha and many of the other characters in the 'doll' workshop where 'distancing' and imaginative engagement and identification with strangeness happened almost simultaneously). Sometimes this was through offering not 'the character' but through enacting *both* the character *and* material relating to a personal response to it (Exercise 4). Sometimes it was about enacting not character at all, but being part of the enactment of a communal dream or experience of which the 'character' was simply one element rather than an individual entity (as perhaps in group 1's enactment of the final exercise). Perhaps more importantly than any of this, no 'message' was prescribed, the students were largely left to find what moved and excited them and to communicate and express it. Thus the 'message' was often double, uncertain, in flux, intuitive.

**Mode:** There were many instances throughout the project, when the students were not working within the parameters of behavioural naturalism – either prompted by the material of the 'message' (Ex 3 and 4) or simply by the possibility of exploring beyond this constraint (Ex 2). They seemed to find this liberating and frightening in equal measure – although less frightening and bewildering at the end of the project than the beginning. Again, attempts to fasten on a clear, defined' mode were rudimentary, and as with the 'message' dimension, the results were often double, fluid, varied.

**Method:** How to find material for a 'message', how to engage with it and then how to express it? Clearly the work done in workshops 1 – 3 could form parts of

a method designed to sensitise and 'prime' the actor/student and at times offer the basis for a development of a methodology towards the development of 'mode'. However there was clearly often a 'middle step' missing in terms of the focusing of the work done in relation to text. The workshops threw up various ideas and proposals as to what these detailed techniques might be. This would clearly offer an opportunity for further research. Beyond this was the issue – as already stated – of how much a detailed and prescriptive methodology was a good thing, or whether the students needed to develop the ability to live without a methodology or even learn to construct and continually evolve their own. The evidence of the last workshop on this was ambiguous: good work emerged without a clear methodological root – and arguably was good specifically because of this – but the process was at times hesitant and awkward – maybe we got lucky in those final exercises. The Musicality work on the other hand is a clear 'frame' or developed methodology, and in the way in which it provides a 'space' in which to present discoveries/developments from the other strands here, is perhaps the basis for a solution to the detailed methodology/application issue and also an emblem of what might be possible as a methodology more inclusive and flexible than 'Narrow Stanislavski'.

On a more general note, this work is clearly only scratching the surface and it could be argued that a case has been made for further exploration of these and allied approaches in performance training. This would undoubtedly enrich the 'Stanislavski project' – i.e. to stage and express 'situational text', but also would provide a preparation for other areas of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century performance spectrum. The students have the potential – is the current training accessing more than a small part of that potential?

## Section Ten: Teaching Stanislavski in Europe: Placing UK Practice in a Wider Frame

*In this section the work of four European actor training conservatoires is considered.*

*The director Katie Mitchell and Anatoly Smeliansky the Head of the Moscow Art School have allowed articles they wrote in 2008 to be included in this research<sup>43</sup>. Interviews by Paul Fryer with teachers Alexander Komlosi from DAMU Academy Prague, The Czech Republic and Professor Sergei Tcherkasski from the St. Petersburg Academy of Theatre Arts, Russia, were recorded on DVD and excerpts are included on the Stanislavski Project DVD.*

### **Katie Mitchell discusses work she saw in 1989 in St Petersburg.**

My first contact with Stanislavski's work was in 1989 when I received a Fellowship to go to Eastern Europe and study directors' training. I went to Poland, Russia, Georgia and Lithuania and watched productions and directing classes in all the main drama schools and theatres. The directing classes were led by practising directors – unlike in the UK. It was possible to watch a performance in the professional theatre one night and the next day see the director work with students at a drama school

There were three practitioners who had a lasting impact: Lev Dodin, Anatoli Vassiliev and Eimuntas Nekrosius. They all were trained in, and used, Stanislavski's system. Of course, each director used their training to create a very different and unique body of work but what united them was a shared ability to immerse the actors entirely in the situation, character and style of the play, together with a very refined visual aesthetic. As a director I aspired to acquire these skills.

It was a first-year directing class with Lev Dodin in St. Petersburg that first introduced me to the discipline of Stanislavski's legacy. Dodin was a thick set, dark and bearded man. As he entered the room, all the students stood neatly in a line. They wore black tights, black ballet pumps and black T-shirts which hugged their bodies. Directing students train for five years and during the first year they only act, working their way through the basic steps of Stanislavski's System. Today they were showing a series of studies, or 'études' as they call them, of their everyday lives. They were allowed to use tables and chairs but all the other objects they used were imaginary. The first student had chosen to re-enact an inhalation he had taken for a bad cold. We all watched.

Half way through the exercise Dodin stopped him.

'What kind of flat is it?' asked Dodin

'My home,' replied the student.

'A private flat?'

'Yes'

'Then why are you taking all the objects you need for the inhalation from the kitchen into the bedroom? Why don't you do your inhalation in the kitchen or

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43 *Stanislavski on Stage*. (Stanislavski Centre. Rose Bruford College.2008)

bathroom where the necessary objects live? There is no logic in what you're doing. If you're ill what's the point in making all that movement? If you're really ill, you'd take the easiest and shortest way.'

'I remember why I did it in the bedroom, there was someone in the bathroom and kitchen.'

'If that was the case then you have to show those circumstances'.

Dodin paused and then asked 'Why are you inhaling?'

'To get better'

'What are you feeling?'

'Very hot, a bad headache and a sore throat.'

'But what kind of feeling does a man who has these symptoms have? Let's try and understand what feeling you have in overcoming the obstacle of the inhalation.'

'A feeling of effort.'

'Of course you have that physical sensation but that's not the most painful and difficult thing. What is most painful and difficult is that you are almost another person. You are sweating, wet, taking pills. Why did you make the inhalation? You have to have a special kind of psychology to carry things back and forth when you are ill. If it were me I would have thought: 'Shall I do this or shall I just sit in bed and take pills?' Also when you spat into the bowl you did it as if you were on a stage. You did it as if you were performing for an audience, to show us you had a bad physical condition. You should, rather, be doing a piece of life. The student remained silent. Dodin continued,

'What do you have on your feet?'

'Slippers.'

'What else are you wearing?'

The student described his clothes and Dodin began to challenge him about them, 'But you're going into a cold kitchen without putting on something warm. You're sweating. You should change your shirt because you would be wet through. In this etude you are supposed to be presenting a piece of life that should occupy your entire body from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. One of the most unpleasant feelings of having a bad cold is when the tips of your hair become wet. When I say this I am not inventing something. I am trying to recall something that actually happened to me in life. This is what I want you to do. Now do the exercise again.'

The disheartened student starts his exercise again. Dodin stops him.

'You are wrong already. Think a little. You have a fever and, as you're not able to overcome the fever, the body starts to relax into it. You have a high temperature and because of this you cannot think clearly. The thoughts going from your brain to your limbs – arms, legs, feet – move more slowly. When you are healthy you do not feel your body but when you are ill you begin to feel it. Now continue'.

At this point the student is really beginning to suffer. I can see him blushing and trying to fight back his embarrassment as he works. Dodin interjects:

'Don't be in a hurry. When you're ill you're not in a hurry.'

The student starts the exercise again by picking up a book. Dodin stops him.

'Reading a book is the most conventional way of starting an etude.'

Again the student had to start and again and again he was stopped by

Dodin.

This grilling continued for an hour.

To begin with I found it a cruel process. Then I realised that it was the only way to teach the level of detail that Dodin wanted - externally and internally. The precision that he demanded from his student was awe inspiring - not least because it required an intense level of observation and concentration from Dodin himself. I saw that he could read thoughts and actions with equal accuracy. I envied him that skill and it became something that I aimed to develop in my own work. There was something scientific about his insistence on the logic of the action and this has stayed with me as a way of analysing and building scenes. I realised that his main interest was behaviour and not words. Finally, and most importantly, I noticed that all his notes were concrete and specific. This was the essential lesson that I took from his rather chilling class and it has provided me with a touchstone in my work with actors ever since.

This contact with Dodin early on in my career brought me closer to Stanislavski than anything I had experienced in the UK before – or since – and proved to me the lasting importance and relevance of Stanislavski's work and legacy.

### **Anatoly Smeliansky, Principal of the Moscow Art Theatre School, considers the place of Stanislavski in Russia today.**

Stanislavski's 'system' as any great idea from the past that is swallowed whole and not properly digested, has a difficult role in Russian Theatre today on account of the fact that there is no critical opposition to Stanislavski in our contemporary theatre. His opponents disappeared years ago: Meyerhold was executed, Mikhail Chekhov left the Soviet Union and Alexander Tairov's Kamerny Theatre was closed down. So, as we begin the process of politically and artistically rehabilitating Stanislavski's opponents, we had to re-evaluate Stanislavski himself. He was familiarly called KS behind his back at the Moscow Art Theatre, so I will use this abbreviation. KS had to be restored to the theatre – theatre that was alive and kicking. His legacy, his ideas, had to be reintroduced and given an opportunity to influence the real theatrical process and the methods of teaching actors – what Meyerhold used to call 'theatre understanding'. Stanislavski had to be reread and republished, and so a new edition of his complete works was born. We had to open and explore his archive when those of Meyerhold and Mikhail Chekhov became available to the public. So now it is time for us to determine what in Stanislavski's legacy is still relevant and what needs to be left in the past.

What is definitely still in demand is Stanislavski's 'System' or 'Method' as it is called in the English-speaking world. There isn't any serious theatre school in Russia that isn't using it in one way or another. It is our main methodology of actor training. It gives logic and consistency to the process of developing skills, of creating an organic life on stage. KS was always afraid that his method would be dogmatised and become a philosophy of acting. He considered it just one of an actor's tools. However, anybody who teaches or is using his method understands

that it contains to a certain degree an understanding of the true nature and goals of the actor's profession.

Yet Stanislavski's vision of the ideal actor is wider and more complex than we used to think. This ideal actor involves himself in live, spontaneous playing in which he is able to find conscious ways of releasing his secret emotional resources; where he can use his emotional resources in a spontaneous way; where he knows how to respond to directions while at the same time improvising; and where he is able to connect with his fellow actors and be part of an ensemble. This well trained actor has to know his super-objective, the through line of his character. As Stanislavski loved to say, to stay true to the action in a sea of opposing counter-actions is to struggle like a small boat, trying to stay afloat among the deadly waves. An actor has to be equipped for survival in such a struggle. So theatre training and practice in Russia is built upon the unity of physical and emotional actions; the sense of rhythm and tempo, and the ability to rise higher above the everyday depiction of life to reach an artistic truth.

The most important question in understanding Stanislavski is the question of the so-called 'truthful life of the actor on stage'. The criticisms raised by Meyerhold, Mikhail Chekhov and Vakhtangov were addressed by KS himself and later by his followers. Stanislavski's response to Meyerhold's Biomechanics was his 'method of physical actions'. Issues raised by Mikhail Chekhov and Vakhtangov were later incorporated by Stanislavski's pupil Maria Knebel in the 'études' that she taught, and these were later used by such directors as Anatoly Efros, Lev Dodin, Petr Fomenko and Anatoly Vasiliev. The best of Stanislavski's true followers took his art out of the limiting framework of 'life-like theatre' that was imposed upon him by the Soviet understanding of theatre. More often than ever now, we refer to what Stanislavski told the young actors of his First Studio as he refined his system: "You have to reach the border of truth, cross that border and then walk back and forth over that border".

That definition pretty much sums up Stanislavski's ideal art of acting and his ideal actor. Unfortunately in this short section it is impossible to discuss the religious roots beneath Stanislavski's understanding of acting. In Soviet times the subject was not even touched upon by scholars. But we should mention the fact that Stanislavski had a deep spiritual awareness. The process of creating a new character was not just a game, but an artistic act equal in its importance to the birth of a child. He asked for a lot, he demanded a great deal from his actors and from the theatre in general. He was often regarded as a fanatic, a fool, an impractical man who refused to see reality. Stanislavski usually chose not to answer such accusations. But once he lost his patience and replied: "I am not practical this season, but my practice will become very useful in the better seasons to come".

When the Moscow Art Theatre celebrated its tenth anniversary, KS recalled a line from an Ibsen play: "I would rather destroy the city than live in it and see how it prospers on lies and deceptions". First of all, this phrase was addressed to his own theatre company, which at the time was at its peak of success and prosperity. It would be hard to find anyone today in the Russian theatre that had the courage to address his company in such a way.



During the Civil War, in one of his classes at his opera studio, a pupil asked Stanislavski to describe in a few words what his ideal theatre was. Stanislavski answered with four words: "Simpler, lighter, higher and more joyful". This is a quintessential description of Stanislavski's own life, his own years of work in search of new forms, where 'earth' (simpler and lighter) can easily merge with the heavens (higher and more joyful). These four words are inscribed next to the portrait of Stanislavski that crowns the stage door of the Moscow Art Theatre. It is quite easy to display his words as a slogan; it is much harder to live by this slogan in practising your art.

## Recommendations

**The following recommendations are made by the research team in the light of this research:**

- I. The research detected a strong dissatisfaction from HE institutions with the examination syllabi set by the A-level Examination Boards and BTEC. The A-level syllabi over all the boards did not seem to encourage a rigorous or in depth study of any individual practitioner and in the case of Stanislavski this often led to misinterpretation, a dependence by teachers on second hand interpretations, a common belief that confused Stanislavski methodology with The Method and a binary divide between Stanislavski and Brecht.

**The team recommends that if students are to study Stanislavski at this level then:**

- a more rigorous approach is introduced by Examination Boards which encourages the direct study of Stanislavski's own ideas in the best translation of his words available.
- the texts recommended by some Boards under 'further resources and support' at present prescribe the approaches taken to the work. There should be a much wider field of scholarship recommended for work at this level in order to develop critical thought in the study of Stanislavski.
- teachers are encouraged to allow more time to cover in a less superficial way the different elements of Stanislavski's 'system' – both his early and later work – and to link his work with the plays he directed.
- his work is placed in an historical context.
- his work is critically assessed by students in the light of contemporary theatre practices – the more space we allow for exploration at this level then the closer we are to the kind of thinking that Stanislavski actually advocated.

2. The research noted a lack of historical clarity in the approach to Stanislavski encouraged in the BTEC syllabi.

**The team recommends:**

- that the BTEC syllabi encourage the direct study of Stanislavski's own ideas in the best translation of his words available.
- that the selection and range of 'Indicative Reading' is scrutinised and widened to encourage more rigorous and in depth scholarship.
- that those charged with facilitating Stanislavski based practice in FE programmes have some degree of practical and theoretical expertise.
- that his work is placed in an historical context.

3. There is concerning evidence of the disparity between the teaching of Stanislavski at pre-degree and degree level.

**The team recommends:**

- that HE lecturers become more aware of the I6+ curriculum.
- that a series of Master Classes on Stanislavski or other practitioners prescribed in the curriculum are organised on a regional basis by SCUDD and PALATINE in order to facilitate a more effective transition between the I6+ curriculum and Higher Education.
- that the establishment of a shared Stanislavski based research website be investigated in order to enhance the understanding of his practice in the curriculum at I6+ and degree level.

4. The research noted that the more practical the HE teaching approach, the more Stanislavski based work is explored.

**The team recommends:**

- that any approach to the work in HE should encourage the direct study of Stanislavski's own ideas in the best translation of his words available.
- that his work is placed in a detailed historical as well as a theatrical context.
- students should have the opportunity to explore Stanislavski's methods and practices in the time scale with which he himself worked.
- that the complexity and change within Stanislavski's work is studied and explained as a development of the "broad brush stroke" approach at I6+.
- that the development of web based material should be used to enhance the contextual study of Stanislavski.
- that the study of Stanislavski is not viewed as a separate ex-centric study with specific parameters but as one methodology which has informed many other practitioners and innovative theatre-makers.
- that this study engage with other models of practice and training and that students are also continually engaged with 'ground level' research, nurturing new routes into performance.

5. The research noted that in the three UK HE conservatoire based degree programmes involved in the research students were being taught Stanislavski based practice alongside the methodologies of later practitioners such as Chekhov, Meisner, LeCoq and Staniewski.

The only evidence however that students were engaging in critical reflection on these methodologies came in Section Nine. Apart from Section Nine there was little critique of the practice or knowledge of the 'expert system' that framed the work. Stanislavski was not mentioned in the case study in Section Seven although his influence on the work was readily acknowledged by the teacher.

**The team recommends:**

- that students are encouraged to critically reflect upon the development of their practice and the methodology of training that they are engaged in.
- that students are encouraged to recognise the expert systems that surround the practice.
- that a variety of pedagogic styles in actor training are explored and critiqued by both teachers and students.

6. The research highlighted a need for the greater alignment of practice based and theoretically led research in the area.

**The team recommends:**

- that opportunities for collaborative research involving partnerships between conservatoire institutions and university departments are encouraged and appropriate funding provided for such research.

7. The research highlighted the value of collaboration with colleagues in Europe.

**The team recommends:**

- that PALATINE commissions a cross-European comparative study of Higher Education curricula in Drama and the Performing Arts.
- that comparative practice in performance training is documented in visual formats for dissemination across the subject area.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix I

### Further details of each Examination Board

#### AEB

Note that since 2000 AEB is now part of AQA.

#### AQA

1. GCE Drama & Theatre Studies 2009 Specification

- Source: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gceasa/dra.php>

GCE Drama and Theatre Studies AS and A Level Specification  
AS exams 2009 onwards – A2 exams 2010 onwards

- Source: [http://www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/drama\\_theatre\\_AS\\_new.php](http://www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/drama_theatre_AS_new.php)

#### Edexcel

Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Drama and Theatre Studies (8DR01) First examination 2009 - Edexcel Advanced GCE in Drama and Theatre Studies (9DR01) First examination 2010

- Source: <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/drama/Pages/default.aspx>

- **OCR**

GCE Performance Studies - OCR Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Performance Studies H148 - OCR Advanced GCE in Performance Studies H548

Source

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/asa\\_levelgceforfirstteachingin2008/performance\\_studies/index.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/asa_levelgceforfirstteachingin2008/performance_studies/index.html) (First link in list of documents.)

#### SQA

National Qualifications Group Award - Technical Theatre (SCQF Level 6)

National Qualifications Group Award - Drama: Theatre Performance (SCQF Level 6)

- Source: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/29264.html>

## WJEC

WJEC AS & A GCE in Drama and Theatre Studies Specification 2009-2010

- Source: <http://www.wjec.co.uk/index.php?subject=47&level=21>

## Glossary of terms & acronyms

**A:** (or A2) Advanced. In year two of a full A-level, students take the A2 - this is not a separate qualification, but the second half of the A-level. The A2 is designed to deepen the knowledge gained during the AS.

**AS:** Advanced Subsidiary. The AS-level can be either a free standing qualification, or be valued as the first half of the full A-level.

- Further information on A and AS:  
[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG\\_10039018](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_10039018)

**AEB:** The Associated Examining Board (AEB) was an examination board serving England, Wales and Northern Ireland from 1953 until 2000. It is now part of AQA.

**AQA:** The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is an examination board in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It compiles specifications for and holds examinations in various subjects at GCSE, AS- and A-level. AQA is a registered charity and independent of the Government. It is regulated by Ofqual, which is the regulator for the public examinations system in England and Wales.

- Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk>

**BTEC:** The Business And Technology Course (BTEC) was a sub-degree conferring council in the United Kingdom until 1996, when its functions were transferred to Edexcel. The council offered further and higher education awards, particularly to polytechnics, and in particular the BTEC Nationals and BTEC Higher Nationals awards which remain prominent.

**Edexcel:** A London based for-profit company and one of England, Wales and Northern Ireland's five main examination boards. The others are AQA, OCR, the Welsh Joint Education Committee, and the CCEA. Its name is a portmanteau word derived from the words "educational" and "excellence". Edexcel offers a variety of qualifications, including A-levels (GCEs), GCSEs and the BTEC suite of vocational qualifications. It is an international organisation, awarding over 1.5 million certificates to students around the world every year.

- Website: <http://www.edexcel.com/>

**GCE:** The General Certificate of Education (GCE) is a secondary-level academic qualification that examination boards in the United Kingdom and a few of the commonwealth countries, notably Sri Lanka, confer to students.

**GCSE:** The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the name of an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 13-16 in secondary education in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

**OCR:** Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) is a UK awarding body, providing qualifications for learners of all ages at school, college, in work or through part-time learning programmes.

- Website: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/index.html>

**SQA:** The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (Scottish Gaelic: Ùghdarras Theisteanas na h-Alba) is a non-departmental public body responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications, other than academic degrees, in Scotland. It is partly funded by the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government.

- Website: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/>

**WJEC:** The Welsh Joint Education Committee (Welsh: CBAC (Cyd-Bwyllgor Addysg Cymru)) is an examination board traditionally serving Wales, but now also serving England, Northern Ireland and international students. Established in 1948, it is based in Llandaff, Cardiff and offers a full range of qualifications including GCSEs, AS- and A-levels in numerous subjects, the Key Skills Qualification and other vocational qualifications.

- Website: <http://www.wjec.co.uk/>



## Appendix 2

### Extracts from Lesson Plans which focus upon the teaching of Stanislavski and extracts from student's written work (Section 2)

#### Lesson 1

##### Learning Objectives:

To read and understand the beginning of Act 2 of Ibsen's *Doll's House*

To introduce the life and ideas of Konstatin Stanislavski

To explore the importance of 'Belief' and 'Action' in Stanislavskian terms

**Resources:** Photocopy of p252. PowerPoint.

#### Activity 1

What is coming out as important in the play for you?

Read the beginning of Act 2. How has Nora changed?

#### Activity 2

See student interpretations

#### Activity 3

Introduce Stanislavski with PowerPoint

#### Activity 4

Acting with purpose

Entrances and exits

**Extension;** Nora's given circumstances.

#### Lesson 2

##### Learning Objectives:

To continue to discover more about Stanislavski's 'system'

To explore the idea of 'Emotion Memory' and its applications

To explore practically the importance of 'Action' to Stanislavski

**Warm up:** Warm up to movement – explain the importance of actor as athlete.

#### Activity 1

Watch scene with students

Listen to music –what emotions do you feel?

#### Activity 2

Remember a time that the song makes you think about. Explore time on stage.

Watch & talk. What were we trying to portray?

What are the dangers and limitations of 'Emotion Memory'?

#### Activity 3

Split up Nora Rank scene

With a partner play out scene.

What does your character want? How do they behave?

Practically explore the scene showing choices of action

Play without words

Play with words

**Activity 4 Plenary**

What is 'Emotion Memory'?

Why might Stanislavski have used it as a starting point?

How does playing out a scene without words help us to understand acting with a purpose?

**Lesson 3****Learning Objectives:**

To read and understand the beginning of Act 2 of Ibsen's *Dolls House*

To introduce the life and ideas of Konstatin Stanislavski

To explore the importance of 'Action' in Stanislavskian terms

**Activity 1**

What is coming out as important in the play for you?

Read the beginning of Act 2. How has Nora changed?

**Activity 2**

See student interpretations

**Activity 3**

Introduce Stanislavski with PowerPoint

**Activity 4**

Acting with purpose

Entrances and exits

**Extension;** Nora's given circumstances.

**Lesson 4****Learning Objectives:**

To consider Stanislavski's concept of belief and to use it practically in your scenes

To evaluate each other's work looking at 'Action' and 'Belief'

To explore Stanislavski's 'Given Circumstances' for the characters of Nora and Torvold

**Activity 1**

Read quotation from Stanislavski

**Activity 2**

10 minutes to practise scene

Watch each scene and evaluate the use of 'Belief' and 'Action'.

**Activity 3**

Introduce "Given Circumstances" with PowerPoint

One group to create "Given Circumstances" for Torvald, the other for Nora.

Feedback on written work.

**Activity 4 Plenary**

What have you learnt about Stanislavski today?

What do you find challenging about his 'system'?

How do you feel using Stanislavski's techniques has enhanced your performance?

## **Lesson 5**

### **Learning Objectives:**

To explore the 'Magic If' and imagination in terms of Stanislavski's system  
To explore and understand 'Units and Objectives', 'Super Objectives' and the 'Through Line of Action'.

### **Activity 1**

Give out photocopies. Recap on what we know about Stanislavski so far.

Imagination – practical exercise.

The 'Magic If' - work with Nora - explain how it fits with the idea of 'Belief.'

### **Activity 2**

Explain Units and Objectives.

Break down the text into Units of Action, each having their own objective

Split p60-63 into Units & Objectives – give a verb for each section

Feedback

Consider Super Objective and Through Line

### **Activity 3 Plenary**

What have we learnt about Stanislavski today?

What key techniques from Stanislavski do you feel confident with?

How would you briefly summarise Stanislavski's 'system'?

Write up your notes and ensure that you can talk about and give examples of exercises we have done on each area of his 'system'.

## **Lesson 6**

### **Learning Objectives:**

To recap on the idea of 'Units and Objectives'

To explore and understand Stanislavski's 'system' of 'Subtext'

To identify the purpose of 'Subtext' in performance and the way it is expressed.

### **Activity 1**

Hand in written work

Share 'Super Objectives' for Nora and Helmer – explain how these create a through line of action, where all the shorter objectives fit in

Re-cap on 'Units and Objectives'

### **Activity 2**

What do we understand by the term 'Subtext'?

Explore practical activities

Play out two friends, argument, one tries to get the other to come round. Now they are trapped. What is the 'Subtext'? What is happening underneath the text?

### **Activity 3**

Read to end of Act 2 – playing the subtext.

Mrs Linde/Nora

Nora/Helmer/Rank/Mrs Linde

Play out the action. Clap or stop when you feel we are playing the subtext.

How are the actors playing the subtext of the scene?

### **Activity 4 Plenary**

What is Nora's subtext?

How was this communicated?

How do we express subtext?

Rehearsal groups: You have 15 minutes practically and five minutes to explain your response to Stanislavski as a practitioner

You will have two weeks as director or actor to work on the final scene between Nora and Helmer

## **Introduction to the History of Theatre. (Year 12)**

### **Lesson 11 Stanislavski and 'The System'**

- a) Discuss with the class their understanding of 'Method' acting and how this originates from the Stanislavski 'System'. Focus on Emotion Memory and Given Circumstances.
- b) Read through hand-out
- c) Create the "Given Circumstances". In partners they are to develop a scene at a school reunion when the bullied comes face to face with the bully. It is fifteen years since they left school.
- d) Students are to draw on their own experiences at school and then use these to create a naturalistic scene.
- e) Perform and evaluate the effect on the audience
- f) Discuss the playwrights Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and the impact they had and continue to have on the world of theatre.

### **Lesson 12 Stanislavski v Brecht**

- a) Discuss 'Physical Actions' with the students.
- b) Recreate the scene from the last lesson developing the use of physical action.
- c) Discuss non naturalistic techniques with the students. List them on the board.
- d) Students are asked to perform the same scenes but adding non-naturalistic techniques.
- e) Perform and evaluate.
- f) How does this make the experience different for both the actor and the audience?

**Homework:** Detailed research on Stanislavski and Brecht and their work in the theatre.

### **Extracts from Student's Written Work:**

#### **Student C**

Stanislavski then embarked on "a quest for the truth in art". Thus Stanislavski created 'The System' this included many techniques as Stanislavski searched for the truth in acting.

Here are some of the techniques from his system:

Action and acting with a purpose

The Magic IF

Given Circumstances

Units and Objectives

Sub Text

These are the main ideas I used in my rehearsal and in other tasks based on responding to his work. I found some of the techniques very helpful in a number of ways for example when you were given a purpose it made it more easy to act as you were more concentrated on achieving that aim or living up to that purpose. The Given Circumstances of a character also helped you focus on your character and how they would react to a situation it also just gave you an over-all history of the character that you were able to use when thinking and moving as that character.

The only negative comment I have about his style of theatre is that sometimes I feel it is a bit too serious and the actor may become too engrossed in a character and forget that the persona they have become is a character and is not really who they are.

#### **Student D**

As the director I asked the actors to tell me what Nora's, Helmer's and Mrs Linde's 'super objective' was throughout the play and told them to remember this when acting, as it will help them with their characterisation.

.... The subtext was that Mrs Linde had a relationship with Krogstad many years ago, which Nora did not know of. I focussed on subtext here because Stanislavski believes in understanding the un-spoken thoughts of the characters.

Helmer...Very manipulative –here I asked the actors how his demanding tone fits into the super objective. Helmer's super objective throughout the play is to maintain his high status....Stanislavski said it is important to identify the super objective, as it creates more understanding for the actor and how they should act as the character.

Stanislavski said "there are logical pauses and psychological pauses." He said that the pauses help convey the subtext. Stanislavski also believed in the importance of moving with a purpose and that a thought could also be a movement. He called this "inner intensity".

I would also have all the actions have a meaning as Stanislavski believed in 'action for purpose'...

I want the actor to feel the emotions you would feel if it was your time to leave your home and explore the world and find the person in you, who has been hiding for many years. The idea of Magic If also really helps the actor to imagine how to feel if this as if it was really happening to them.

## Appendix 3

### Beyond Stanislavski: The Workshops

#### Workshop 1 (Saturday 28 February, 10am – 4pm)

This was run jointly by **Steve Duncan** and **Colin Ellwood** and the account which follows is greatly indebted to material provided by Steve Duncan. The broad aim was to explore whether engagement with the sense of smell, together with the actors' production of their own rich imaginative written text out of these stimuli, could lead to a deeper and more intuitive engagement with Chekhov's text. This approach was developed from previous joint work by CE and SD looking at the generation of spontaneous poetic text by actors as a 'bridging' device to performance (this approach has some relation to Meisner technique). The choice of 'smell' was suggested by Steve Duncan. Clearly sense memory falls within 'broad' Stanislavski, but the hypothesis was that a fuller engagement than would be the norm in mining the physical given circumstances of the text (given circumstances would be more usually broadly visual, situational and biographical) and especially this apparently 'left field' and more primal dimension – smell – might release the actor and unlock the text and offer a way to richer modes, messages and methods. Perhaps more fundamentally 'beyond Stanislavski' was the technique of having the participants write their own texts in response to stimuli as part of the process of evolving and capturing individual nuanced responses and so developing their ability to make strong, individual artistic choices. It was also hoped that, in this respect, the act of writing might also serve as a model for the students' own interpretative process in performance.

A collective physical warm-up and relaxation led to the silent envisaging of favourite smells and then a gentle, silent and closed-eyed group exploration of the smells of each other and the room. This led to an enthusiastic and sensitised discussion around the power of smell and its ability to connect more fundamentally to the body than does for example sight, and smell's function as a more primal, animalistic, emotion-rich sense. Students noted the subtle layering of different body and clothes smells, 'clean and dirty' smells, gender smells, etc.; also the richness of associations set off by smells and the erotic and intimacy-provoking potential of smells. It was also noted, for example, that the theatre rarely refers directly to smell, yet smell as a human presence is always prevalent, for example in the relation between actor and audience, the innate smell of the theatre, the 'dry ice', the perfume of the actors, the auditorium. Looking ahead to the Chekhov, it was also remarked that 1900 smells - given for example the absence of synthetic cleaners (with their comparatively 'two-dimensional' smells) and modern washing facilities - would be more pungent than now.

The group in a circle then read through the Chekhov, each student in turn taking characters as they presented themselves. The focus was the overall concerns/experiences of the text - as these would feature throughout the project - but also more immediately the 'olfactory' dimension of the text. At the conclusion of the reading, experiences were identified of 'possession and eviction';

dislocation; remembering/forgetting; dreams and disappointments; of order and measure and identity being 'out of phase', of truth being told and avoided, status jumbled.

Next, students were asked to set aside thoughts of the Chekhov and engage with real smells assembled by Steve Duncan. These had all been chosen with the Chekhov in mind, but it was felt that a direct engagement with them as smells was an important stage in the process. This was through a series of items that students were encouraged to 'breathe in' the scent of silently, independently, and after a moment's introspection. These included moth balls, alcohol (vodka), burnt clothing, an old book, pine needles, perfume, burnt wood etc. This was an extraordinary sight: The objects, laid out in the centre of the room, the students coming forward, silently, selecting an object and then retreating to a corner to engage intimately and reflectively with it, before returning it to the centre. Most students chose three objects. Steve then encouraged them independently to write a short text stimulated/inspired by the scent. This could start as a simple description of the smell experience and then progress as an evocation or memory in the form of an informal poem, memo, letter, etc. Most students wrote three.

After lunch a reading of these written texts by the students, grouped by objects, was followed by a discussion of themes across the results with an enthusiastic and original commentary. Burnt wood seems to stimulate memories of childhood (camping, nature walks, family); perfume stimulates memories of mothers, aunts and grandmothers, mothballs of mysterious or 'anxious' cupboards. Students seemed personally engaged, their 'sensoriums' and associative memories fired. That each of the smells had some 'location' in the Chekhov text was the springboard into the next exercise, where small groups of students in separate spaces tackled the four core scene exercises outlined above. Interestingly, when asked to choose one of the exercises, the only one initially not chosen by anyone was the basic Stanislavski (Ex.1).

Students were asked to pay particular attention to the 'smells' of the scene, as reinforced by the writing work, but it was also hoped that the smell 'priming' work and writing exercises would also help to deepen the students' responses in other ways and alert them to the possibilities of autonomous artistic choice at their disposal.

Twenty minutes were allocated for groups to choose a short section of the Chekhov text and explore/rehearse it for informal showing, but in fact the time extended to almost twice that. SD joined the group tackling Exercise 4, while CE toured the rehearsal rooms observing and occasionally offering advice. Overall students initially seemed to struggle with the transition from the enthusiasm and fluency of the earlier work of the day and in bringing the day's earlier experience to this exercise. On reflection an interim stage in which the student generated texts were performing/enacting might have served as an appropriate transitional 'embodiment' phase. But this issue of the transition from broad awareness and creativity work to text work would become a key concern throughout the project. Certainly the students often initially floundered when deprived of the simple 'Stanislavski' procedures and 'targets' they were being trained in. Was this because of the universal value of these procedures, or simply because reliance on



them had weakened artistic muscles that otherwise would have developed and could still be recuperated? Would all this be helped by more explicit and developed techniques linking the exploratory to the text work, or would this itself be missing the point by reducing the possibility of the exploratory work to a 'mechanism'?

The group tackling Exercise 3 seemed initially the most challenged. They seemed unsure as to what they were looking for in the text material (the 'message') beyond Stanislavskian 'character affective consciousness' and also of how to communicate it (the 'mode') outside of a kind of Stanislavski behaviourism. Only when it was suggested that they establish a pattern of continuous almost random movement and simply respond to the text as they read it did they begin to make progress. This resulted in much less calculating, less intellectual engagement, and some of the extreme responses to smell and sensuality from earlier seemed to filter through. They seemed to begin to trust their bodily, intuitive responses. Interestingly, this approach (setting up a continuous physical movement that can then be a 'platform' for instinctual responses) has something in common with the musicality work of Workshop 4. Here it was the first success in beginning to find an 'intermediary' between exploratory work and detailed text work.

The showings were as follows:

- Ex1: This group produced a clear, well-communicated and apparently spontaneous 'in the moment' 'improvisation' of a short section of the Act. It was noted by observers however that it was rather dry and physically and sensually under-inhabited. This was partly due to a misunderstanding on the part of the group of the exercise and its intended relation to the morning and early afternoon work. All subsequently acknowledged that it would be extraordinarily exciting and perfectly possible to let the focus on the smells of the situation filter through into the actors engagement with the scene to create a much more 'sensually realised' version. It was felt this would need little 'intermediary' work (beyond the morning smell and text work) other than realisation that it was possible.
- Ex2: This group offered a highly theatrical non-naturalistic account of a short scene, bold and energised. It contained some richly inexplicable elements but – comment afterwards suggested – also some calculated, sometimes apparently non-instinctual, elements commenting externally and judgementally on the characters - almost at times a denial of the instinctual, smell based experiences - almost Brechtian at times. Could this perhaps be a reminder that the sensual, emotional, personal, unstructured feelings and responses incited by the smell work was potentially unsettling for some students, particularly where they were not used to working in this way or expressing this kind of material.
- Ex3: As already indicated this group had had most difficulty in preparation and in fact had the least 'set' material when it came to the showing. They began the showing by establishing their continuous movement 'base' and suddenly early in the scene what seemed like real spontaneous, instinctual and highly theatrical life seemed to kick in - with the student playing Tusenbach whirling in silent music. Had the focus in the morning on the instinctual and individually associative empowered and released these actors? The discussion afterwards seemed to

suggest this was something of a breakthrough in terms of what was being looked for. The participating students could not account for their choices here other than to suggest they were operating on instinct, and that they felt sure, confident and 'in flow'.

- Ex4 This group interspersed sections of the Chekhov with their own associative, smell-related text. The effect was thrilling - especially in the transitions, with the students seeming to have a sense of real ownership and engagement with the Chekhov on the level of and with the intensity of their own lives. The next step could well have been a more physically brave enactment, as the 'rehearsal' focus had been the ordering of the text.

Afterwards and at the end-project plenary there was an extremely strong sense in discussion that the workshop had offered the possibility of a fuller engagement with Chekhov's text within a broad Stanislavski frame, had developed the instinct and confidence of the students in trusting their own and each others responses, and had perhaps enhanced and deepened the sense of ensemble. Attentiveness to something as primal as smell, especially when linked to transitional exercises such as the generation of text and the enacting of this text could – it was generally felt - promote a more instinctual, confident and bolder version of the scene and 'mode' of communication, as well as making performer choices starker and richer (e.g. of what to communicate, what the 'message' was) and empowering the performer. The writing of texts seemed to make the students more aware of their creative autonomy, offered a model of themselves and their tasks as actors. An encouraging start.

## **Workshop 2 (Saturday 7 March, 10am – 4pm)**

Led jointly by **Colin Ellwood** and **Laurie Slade** and based on an ongoing (four years) strand of research exploring the value to theatre work of Social Dreaming as developed by psychotherapist Gordon Lawrence. This work was very much outside the mainstream Stanislavski tradition, having more in common with Michael Chekhov's work.

The workshop began with a ninety-minute 'social dreaming matrix', with participants sitting in a circle sharing and associating to each others' dream material. Some students had experienced this process before but for most it was new. Dreams shared included: several involving siblings; an experience of wearing another's clothes while dropping lit matches; the confusion of reality with dreaming; the shocking discovery of familiar figures in inappropriate and unexpected locations; the experience of being inside, then outside one's own body; the experience of being naked in public; also of being asked to stand in performance for Madonna; the passage of time and the neglecting of an important task; the impinging of real sounds (for example an alarm clock going off) into the dream world; the characteristic of dreams of familiar people being 'simplified', reduced to a few key characteristics; images associated with guilt and neglect.

The matrix created a very strong sense of ensemble intimacy and mutual support - as was acknowledged subsequently by participants. It was, incidentally,

impossible not to notice how many of the dreams shared were congruent with the Chekhov. Whether this was because of the degree to which the students had become familiar with the act and it had entered their subconscious, whether because Chekhov makes full use of material resonant with dreams, or through some other mechanism or simply a coincidence, remained a question addressed in the subsequent 15 minute 'reflection on the matrix'.

The next stage was to read again the Act aloud, with the matrix still in mind, and then undertake another, shorter 'matrix', where the material of the act was presented by students as if it were a dream. Students recounted and commented on movements or images in the Chekhov that had the resonance or intensity of dream for them and others 'associated' with/to these moments. This took 45 minutes and was followed by lunch.

The afternoon began with a physical warm up and relaxation exercises, leading to a range of exercises designed to evoke and express physically and kinetically the images and events of the matrices (dream and Chekhov). These included the quiet recollecting of a resonant image and allowing the body to be shaped by the emotional response to this, and then silently 'sculpting' a partner; and the solo enacting of a dream 'action' subsequently evolved into a physical 'score'. This gave the students a 'repertoire' of physical images and actions for the next – transitional - exercise (the one perhaps missing from the 'smell' workshop) - a series of small group improvisations/performances (prepared over twenty minutes and each lasting three or four) drawing on the dream and 'Chekhov dream' material. This resulted in three short pieces, two of which found a musical, rhythmic shape for combined elements of the individual movement scores and embodied responses, containing fragments/echoes of both the dream matrix and the 'play-as-dream' matrix - in other words all from material which individual and then groups of students had found 'inexplicably' or 'non-rationally' powerful and resonant.

Groups 1 and 2 delivered remarkably similar impassioned pieces involving individually developed physical scores rising to a climax and with a sense of individual 'trapped-ness' and drawing on a collage of dream and play actions and images.

The work of Group 3 had a different quality. The performance had the 'coolness' rather than the 'intensity' of dreams and seemed to access the 'warped logic' rather than emotional dimension of the dream experience. It was also more 'integrated' than the other two pieces, in the sense that the participants worked not just in relation to each other (as in 1 and 2), but also acknowledging each other and even playing actions in relation to each other: Two students sat on the floor discussing/arguing about the naming of a pet lizard, with one mangling the word order of their sentences, while a third student circled round, with a kind of meandering, shuffling lope, gently singing Gershwin's 'Summertime', occasionally making suggestions on the lizards name, and ultimately miming the casual dropping of matches. The performance concluded with the naming of the lizard. The overall effect reported by onlookers was of a strangely hypnotic quality. Was this material random? Having shared in the dream matrix, spectators might have been aware that one student (not in fact in the performance) had told of the dream of a

pet lizard who in real life as a child he had neglected, returning to haunt him in the form of a quest for a disappearing lizard in dreams. He associated this with feelings of guilt, of unfulfilled responsibilities. In the subsequent discussion the participant who'd been singing 'Summertime' couldn't initially account for why she had chosen to do this, but recalled that it was the lullaby her mother had sung to her as a little girl. The excavating, sharing and absorbing of others' unsettling, un-rationalised, and to some extent unprocessed material was obvious and impressive, as perhaps were the possible links to themes, experiences and emotional terrains of *Three Sisters*: for example the absent mother, the sense of imminent decay or loss through duty unfulfilled. Beyond this, the inclusion of the lizard seemed to offer a huge range of primal associations - and the naming of it almost an emblem for the project in particular and a pervasive model of what art tries to achieve generally. To dismiss this material would be to dismiss the value of the associative unconscious itself in the creation of art. The response of observers to the performance underlined the value of this material - it would be perfectly possible to analyse the showing not in terms of what the material meant to the participating students, but more broadly, in relation to potential audiences and the resonance it might have for them.

Perhaps these images were over-consciously culled and cobbled together? None of the images and actions employed here seemed 'conscious at the point of choice of performing material' by the students. All three groups said that in preparation they had simply shared material and made decisions on the basis of 'what worked' - not, in other words, through the application of any outside structure or framework or criteria. These works were grown more than constructed, their material and its resonance 'contained' rather than 'understood'. Students were working on instinct, in a small way trusting themselves not just to produce material of some power, but to consciously shape it without reference to an external authority - they were in control, drawing on an autonomous and increasingly shared instinct for material and also how to perform it. In all cases the material wasn't in any way portentous or clumsily symbolic, nor was it shallow or clichéd - it was simply live.

No one would claim these were world shattering performances or pieces of great import, but they seemed to show signs of an originality, sure-footedness and boldness often missing from students' work when working in more conventional 'Stanislavski' contexts. In terms of the method/mode/message criteria: Obviously the pieces were arrived at by non-Stanislavski methods and performed in non-Stanislavski modes - as these have been defined above - (although the work of Group 3 was somewhat more 'behaviourist' in actor physicality than the work of the other two groups). In 'message' - i.e. what they communicated - clearly this was not Chekhov's text nor the 'inner lives' of his characters, although Groups 1 and 2 contained fragments that seemed to be an intensification of the inner experience of some characters.

In terms of the Exercises, the feeling of the group was that this work could both complement a Stanislavski approach to the scene (by offering an enrichment of a given circumstances context) (Ex 1); and intensify and 'de-naturalise/behaviourise' the mode of physical and vocal expression of it by offering an intensity and clarity of dream-like experience that required broader expression (Ex 2). The group also

felt that it could also perhaps offer a different way of engaging with and a different expression of a different, instinctively, autonomously discovered meaning/truth of the Chekhov material than could possibly be envisioned by Stanislavski or available in the “Narrow Stanislavski” defined above (Ex 3), and could certainly allow the culturing of material through which the Chekhov text could be 'jammed/dialogued with' in performance (Ex 4). The above performances hovered round the Ex 3 - 5 areas.

One development from Workshop 1 in terms of methodology was that while a text written by the individual student had been the 'transitional element' there, this workshop took over an hour on *embodying* the insights, energies and intuitions of the basic material (in this case the dream and play-as-dream material) before re-engaging with the Chekhov directly. This gave the students something to hold onto and to use in any scene work as a kind of Michael Chekhov psychological gesture.

### **Workshop 3 (Saturday 14 March, 10:30am – 4:00pm)**

This was led by **Chris Johnston**, with CE observing. CJ brought vast improv experience tapping into the pre-conscious. The challenge was how this might be brought to bear (method) broadening the response/engagement *with* (message) and expression *of* (mode) the Chekhov text. A phone call the day prior to the workshop requested cellotape, cardboard boxes, dolls, linen material, packing material, scissors, glue etc., but no clue as to how these might be used.

The day began with all the elements - including about 30 dolls of all sizes and shapes and kinds - being laid out for inspection. The students were split into groups, each with the task of constructing, from the material provided, in as detailed a manner as possible, one of the key locations of the play: the house, the town, the garden, Moscow. Students threw themselves into the tasks, making bold choices and working both literally and symbolically. CJ encouraged them to be as detailed as possible (for example the barracks in the town, the town hall, how to represent the fire). Moscow was constructed outside the locked glass door/window of the rehearsal room (so literally 'unattainable'), a symbolic mixture of high-heeled shoes and champagne flutes. There was one extraordinary moment when a huge copy of Fokine's design for Nijinsky's Faun was manhandled into view beyond the window by the students, their having come across this extraordinarily appropriate object while scavenging around the college (an approach which also yielded dividends for the other groups in terms of off-cuts of wood, fallen tree branches, etc). The garden was a delicate creation of small shrubs and flowers with pre- and post- Natasha areas (the post being predominantly a violent pink). All this took about 30 minutes, and was followed by the whole group touring and surveying the work. The next stage was to write on bits of paper significant moments/memories from the past life of the play and place them in the appropriate location of our work.

Then attention was turned to the dolls. Students were asked to choose dolls to represent all the characters of the Act. This was an extraordinary exercise and unexpectedly huge enthusiasm was released and a strong consensus quickly

emerged for each one. Again, people seemed to work and respond on instinct, in that there was very little pre-'rationalisation' of choices, or working out of the logic of options, rather a 'post' choice unpacking of meaning. Thus Tusenbach was a little 'tigger' stuffed toy, his stripes somehow representing the gaudy fashionability of the character's new civilian clothes. Olga was a pierrot doll, pale and bald with a single tear running down her cheek, Kolygin was a small bear with a little red heart sewn onto his chest, and Natasha was a small plastic pig with the body of a glamour model. Andre's servant was a small stuffed, low slung ant-eater. Even Protopopov made an appearance, as a rather inscrutable stuffed dachshund. This process could of course easily have been reductive - the characters becoming mere parodies, caricatures, but by all accounts the experience was anything but. There was rather a feeling that something fundamental clarifying had been found, some energising essences, and indeed the experience was of energy being released in the students in relation to the characters rather than constricted. It was pointed out that students the previous week had noted a dream's tendency to expand *one* characteristic of a known person featured, to focus on perceived essences rather than externals. A later student comment was that it was intensely liberating to see these characters from outside, rather than in the internalised mode normally associated with Chekhov.

Next, small groups took groups of character dolls (the sisters, the soldiers, the towns people), with the instruction to add to the figures to make them more appropriate for their characters. Kulygin acquired a mortarboard, poor Andre (a small bear) acquired a small dog attached to his ankle like a ball and chain, representing the infant 'Bobok', who clearly was a dog and not a bear, as Protopopov was.... Natasha (glamour-pig) was given a full-size hand mirror on which she glided narcissistically as if on a magic carpet.

After lunch the students began working with the 'characters' in the constructed locations, exploring their 'essential' and 'characteristic' movements, locations and verbalisations - instinctively improvised - very much as children do playing with dolls and manipulating them. This was clearly something all the students had done many times in their lives - but not in most cases for quite a number of years. The unselfconscious playfulness released allowed the students to be bold and intuitive in choices. Slowly and methodically under Chris's detailed instruction, scenes and encounters were set up and enacted. A Soliony/Tusenbach standoff in pursuit of Irina was particularly deft in dramatising the key feints of bloke-ish love rivalry. There was a gentleness and sensitivity to this work. A further development might have been to explore more fully what the 'mask' of the doll, in its strangeness, offered the actor in terms of inhabiting the character in work again derived ultimately from Michael Chekhov.

The day finished with the students enacting actual scenes from the play drawing from the experience of watching and manipulating and voicing the dolls. These latter exercises accorded to Ex 1, 2 and 3 (even the possibility of a doll version suggested rich possibilities of mode). Interestingly, in terms of 'message' the 'character' work here sometimes seemed to express 'internal psychological essence of character' (more Michael Chekhov - Irene's baby faced innocence and openness), or sometimes wry comment on character (Natasha a la Brecht), rather than the psychologically dynamic but constricted realism (inner monologue etc.) of

the Stanislavski 'message'. The scene work itself more approached an intensification of Stanislavski by deploying and shifting between the Michael Chekhov and Brecht perspectives fed into the Stanislavskian realisation of motivational actions.

It was with some reported sadness that students had to dismantle the creations and tidy the room quickly. Afterwards and in the plenary questions were raised as to the relation between this work and the broader Stanislavski framework. In some senses this work was very much within that framework - the realisation and exploration of the physical world and the back story of the characters, the improvisation of scenes. But it was also strongly felt by participants that there were other gains of huge value: The re-invoking of the students' 'play' instinct, the simple, primary creativity of making something from limited and on the face of it unsuitable resources, the texture and pleasure of this, of finding solutions without rules or prescribed process from limited and challenging material; the reconfiguring of the Chekhov as something other than 'high art to be treated with due solemnity', the encouragement of students to make bold, instinctual choices. All of these aspects address the reservations expressed about 'Narrow Stanislavski' approaches by the students (see above). A further dimension was suggested for further exploration linking Workshops 1 and 2: inhabiting the play as dream as expressed through the 'essences' of the dolls (dolls after all freak a lot of people out), a development of the openness to strange and fresh experiences, to explore and to trust oneself in doing so – not notable characteristics of 'Narrow' Stanislavski.'

#### **Workshop 4 (Tuesday 17 March, 2pm - 7pm)**

This was led by **Marcin Rudy** and **Matthieu Bellon**. Owing to scheduling issues, some of the participants of the other workshops were unable to attend, although other - mainly directing BA - students joined in.

The general aim was to engage with Chekhov's text (and text in general) initially through its *musicality* rather than its logical meaning or the imaginary situation it related to. Having said that, it was hoped that once a musical form for the chosen piece of text was established by the performer as a kind of kinetic and auditory canvas, an intuitive responsiveness to the Stanislavski-defined situation, character and objective - intuitive and therefore richer than a solely intellectual engagement - would inflect the musicality and enactment of musical and rhythmic bodily engagement. The *canvas* would be a physical one informed by the performer's sensitivity to flow and rhythm, but the *painting* would be Chekhov's or rather Chekhov's/the performer's in full engagement.

A word about the term 'musicality': By this is meant full physical expressiveness of the performer *in flow*. With the easing and tightening of rhythm expressively through and with the body and voice, as a kind of *rubato*, and the positioning and movement of the body in relation to the text as a kind of shaped dance (although

a spontaneous and not patterned one, focusing on impulse not repetition as in conventional dance). The text becomes the 'score', the song, and the body of the actor dialogues with it, expresses it and shapes it. For the actor it is a matter of spontaneity, not working intellectually but instinctively, fundamentally in the body. It involves taking the text and shapes it and expresses it into a single, shaped, dynamic, ultimately balanced *now*, a single moment, rather than a series of separate, discrete ones, so, the theory is that the actor goes deeper because he is never 'let off the hook', is always drawn – in an ultimately balanced way, so never losing contact with his centre – onwards. The actor is 'present' to the verbal text itself, the situation, the fellow actor, or even the environment - always in spontaneous impulse-driven, shaping dialogue. There is an obvious corrective here to the students' concerns about 'Narrow Stanislavski' – for example the Stanislavski division of text into 'bits'. The direct origin of this work is Staniewski although clearly there is an ancestral debt to Meyerhold.

After an intense physical warm-up a number of exercises were explored. Some students were new to this work; others had some experience of it. Students were asked to work in pairs, each pair holding between them a wooden stick and using it to 'dialogue' physically and intensely between themselves in the space. All pairs worked simultaneously and at a high pitch, exploring extremes of dynamics, becoming energised and sensitised to each other as the 'other' and drawing and transmitting energy from and to each other. The impression was of continuous but extraordinarily dynamic flow of great 'amplitude'. This led to a variation in which the grip on the stick of one of each duo changed in such a way that they could control and manipulate their partner. And on the instruction of MR and MB, verbal text of choice was introduced also by the leading partner. MR began to characterise the 'responsive' silent partner as 'the text', and encouraged the speaker to *embody* his vocal expression of this through an impulsive manipulation of the partner through the stick, so body and text became one while preserving the text as the 'other' being engaged with, jammed to.

This was clearly a manipulation of the text, or rather an expression of only one part of it - its 'musical' qualities. It was notable, however, that changes of rhythm and pace and physical expression were not arbitrary nor dictated purely by the formal, material aspects of the text but also an expression/inflection of the text in its total situational context *at the level of pre-conscious impulse*. Certainly there was in the room an air of intense concentration and of energy that was fully released and also controlled, actors working at full potential. Because the students would not necessarily know by heart text from *Three Sisters*, any familiar text was allowed, but to the degree this was applicable to Chekhov, clearly this exercise allowed both an expression of the text, the situation and anything else implicit in it (Ex 1 - 3) and, if desired, a more 'partnered', 'dialogic', approach (Ex 4). Here, potentially, was an approach that integrated in fundamentally very simple method a huge flexibility of mode and message, and in fact could be only part of a method, being potentially able to 'theatricalise' the material of any of the three workshops so far.

As a development of this sequence the sticks were removed so that students retained only an imaginary link with their partners, so requiring even greater sensitivity. Finally the silent partner was stood down, and the remaining partner



was left with the text. The result was a series of physical 'runnings' of text, body and voice coordinated and underwritten by a huge but well-modulated release of energy. Particularly memorable was a Japanese student, repeatedly intoning and articulating a short text in Japanese with a measured interrogatory ferocity, and a Norwegian student tackling Shakespeare in English with similar fluency and edgy control. Control was somehow part of the key (this was subsequently confirmed by MB). This wasn't about emotional expression *of itself* - although that was very much part of it - but rather about testing the form with emotion, almost but not quite to breaking point. It was about control at the edge of containment - if the form, the shape was burst, then all tensility, all expressiveness was lost. This was a kind of high-wire act with text.

The group were clearly tired, but this was perhaps a pre-requisite for one final exercise: defences were down. The group formed a large circle and began stamping a 'triplet rhythm': *ONE two three - ONE two three*, on alternate feet, towards the centre of the circle. Individually students were invited to come to the centre and 'respond to the rhythm', engage with it. Sticks were introduced again. This time as the student at the centre spoke, he/she had to catch and return sticks randomly thrown toward him. The engagement with the text – on some occasions Chekhov's – became more intense and more grounded, clearer even, certainly more 'expressed'. Thereafter the student at the centre simply communicated their text to a face or series of faces in the circle, responding all the time to the impulse of the shared rhythm. At one point, when one speaker began to shout, he was advised by MR to 'hold it on the edge' and the result was a controlled articulation and an extraordinary deep engagement with the text, as if the strength of the text, its formal properties and the students' ability to remain in flow with them allowed the speaker to be extremely brave with the emotions released. The focus on the physicality and on instant responses allowed the intuition and unconscious of the actor to work uninhibited (this to some extent recalled Cicely Berry's work on text with Peter Brook and others).

For all involved, the sense afterwards was of the extraordinary 'releasing' and empowering value of this approach in terms of the aims of the project and of its potential in providing a way of engaging with and integrating the discoveries, intuitions and sensitivities arising out of Workshops 1 - 3 into the realm of physicality and into the formal 'holding mechanism' that the text provides. The work here was extraordinarily group sensitive, fundamentally intuitive, and – crucially for this or any other performance project – involved the spontaneous and comprehensive physicalisation of those intuitions.

### **Workshop 5 (Saturday 21 March, 10:30am - 4pm)**

Led by **Colin Ellwood**, this had initially been intended as a broad Stanislavski workshop, to see how the experience of the workshops could filter through into a Stanislavski frame (Ex 1 and 2). However, given the development of the work so far, and also the fact that time constraints had prevented on some days going through the full sequence of '4 Exercises', and given also that one of the key issues was applicability of the work (especially of Workshops 1 and 2) in a controlled way (in other words the converting intuition and insight to impulse and action)

without reducing it to a 'reified' mechanistic process, it was felt that something broader and more open – in other words depending on the students' 'creativity' towards finding mechanisms/processes as necessary – might be useful at this stage – and especially in relation to the more 'open' Exercise 3.

Work began with a physical warm-up and then, as a starting point, in two groups the students found a short section from the Chekhov act to enact/improvise in line with 'Ex 1': paying attention to key events, objectives and given circumstances. The piece chosen by both groups was the Irena, Tusenbach, Kolygin exchange about the possibility of a charity concert to raise funds for fire victims and whether Masha might play the piano in it – an exchange punctuated by the doctor smashing the clock.

The intention was that this exercise would serve as a framework, a 'control' example for further work. Interestingly, the students' discussion of the task was highly complex, but their initial enactment (after about half an hour) seemed 'heady', un-communicated. They weren't in the main playing actions but 'demonstrations', over-simplifications of the characters. Might there be any significance to this? After all these were in the main training actors with some familiarity with this 'Stanislavski' method. What had gone wrong? A disorientation due to the range of work of the project? After comment, a further attempt began to release some of the interactive energy of the scene and two good, 'transitive, event-specific, action-playing' versions of the section achieved.

After lunch a short series of exercises focused on the students' reconnecting to the play and its core by word associating to it ('message' related), and then a physicalisation exercise explored how a selection of these words might be expressed ('mode' related) through continuous movement (this was a rudimentary variation of the musicality work). Then in a relaxation exercise, there was an attempt to reconnect students to the experiences of the previous workshops by running over their sequence and main events and experiences as the students lay with eyes closed. It was noted here that forgetting was as important as remembering - what had stayed? Clearly, however, these were no substitutes for the experience of the workshops themselves.

For the final and in a sense summative (assuming a linear model of development was at all appropriate for this kind of work) exercise, students worked on the same section of text as in the morning. The task was to present it in any framework of mode or message. As to method there was also a choice – whether to use/develop specific technique(s) for guiding intuitive responses to the material and developing/allowing those responses into physical enactment (and if so, which techniques? And would this be itself 'restrictive?') – or to trust simply in instinct unsupported by conscious 'technique' and hope that some fresh and effective way of engagement would emerge, in line with the aims and experiences of the project as a whole.

Prior to embarking on this final preparation period, and then in its early phase CE toured the rehearsal rooms suggesting four possible 'linking' techniques (should they be required) for drawing on the material of the earlier workshops:

- Smells: to identify, investigate, engage with, imagine and express the smells of the scene (to imagine and then represent their physical effect and then work the scene with the 'smell' volume turned right up).
- Dreams: to take turns to read the section while the others lay on the floor allowing their imagination to conjure the scene as a dream. To share accounts and then stage the most remarkable or resonant elements.
- Play/Impro: To take the dolls of the characters (they were available) and express them, focus on them as strange essences/masks of the characters.
- Musicality: to enact the section linking hands as a substitute for sticks, to form the circle and so energise the scene.
- Other possible 'linking' techniques already mentioned and viable with more time in this session.
- Developing (as potentially in workshop 1 and actually in workshop 2) an individual or group improvised performance 'score' out of the primary material that could then be set against or cannibalised (as a kind of Michael Chekhov psychological gesture) for the scene.
- The setting up of a continuous movement 'frame' as in the musicality work through which intuitions could be physically inflected (this is a version of the 'musicality' work).
- As in Workshop 1, the spontaneous writing and then performing of poetic text as a way of 'fixing' insights.

For the final performances students in fact reported not 'formally' using any of the above yet the work had a freshness and even a haunting quality very redolent of the dream and smell and 'doll' experiences and boldly beyond the constraints of behaviourist naturalism (so in a sense an extreme version of Ex 3, hovering towards Ex 4).

Group 1: This used music (a recorder, a cymbal and a piano) to enact the various characters' relationships both to music and as a mode expression of their inner emotional life. The 'flatness' of dream was set against the intensity and emotional distress of Irena's sense of being trapped. Movement had the logic of inner states not surface reality, and the piece managed deliberately at various points to 'loop back' on itself, as in a dream. An observer's suggestion was that this was clearly Irena's 'dream'.

Group 2: Emotionally released and bold, but also with great control in the way in which – again dream-like – actors shifted characters. An extraordinary sense of coordination (after only 20 minutes preparation time) and playing that was at times both witty and cool and at others full of the characters' frustration and distress. Many examples of impulsive, intricate physicality – characters spinning. Kolygin shuffled round in small circles – was it reading too much in this to see an

echo of the clock the doctor was about to smash (delineating a circle into small portions)?

There was a definite sense – both in observers and from participants – of the performers working intuitively, sensitively and with real commitment. The work was boldly non-naturalistic, but the performance style wasn't clichéd or conventional. Message and mode were striking and unfamiliar, method – in these cases – seemed to have been instinctive and individual to the groups or even individual students. A question hung in the air. Would the students have been able to produce this work four weeks ago?